

VERNON LEE: AESTHETICS, HISTORY, AND THE FEMALE SUBJECT
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By

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By

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This study investigates how Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) inscribed female subjectivity in the aesthetic and historical discourses of the late nineteenth century. Based on recent feminist and lesbian literary criticism, this project re-evaluates Vernon Lee's marginal position as a female writer by 1) situating her in the context of the highly gendered aesthetic debates of the *fin de siècle* that determined her status in literary history; 2) demonstrating how she created space for a female voice by rewriting contemporary literary and historical discourses, in particular Paterian aestheticism, from a woman's point of view; 3) analyzing how Vernon Lee's innovative textual strategies helped shape an alternative female subjectivity in three conventional genres--the historical essay, the

novel, and the fantastic short story--while simultaneously subverting the concept of literary categories; 4) demonstrating how her construction of a lesbian perspective in multiple subtexts undermines the conventional notion of subjectivity itself and with it the epistemological presuppositions of late-nineteenth-century discourses on history, literature, and art.

CHAPTER 1
WRITING BETWEEN GENDER LINES: VERNON LEE'S DEVELOPMENT OF
LESBIAN SUBJECTIVITY

At thirty seven I have no public, but on the other hand, I am singularly far from being played out and crystallized, as I see most writers become even before this age.

(Vernon Lee to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, 31 August, 1893)

How Can We Read Vernon Lee Today?

Vernon Lee's self reflection in the letter to her half-brother came at a time when she had actually published a good dozen of her most successful books and was getting Althea: A Second Book of Dialogues ready for publication.¹ She had a well established reputation as historian, art critic, and fiction writer. From today's viewpoint, Lee's complaint about her marginal position is more prophetic than factual. It seems that her distancing from the demands of a general reading public is as much a gesture of frustration as an expression of desire for writerly independence.

Although the contemporary reviews of Lee's works were often critical, she was respected for her distinctive,

erudite, and intelligent work. Her literary friends from Walter Pater to Henry James admired her intellectual sharpness, but they did not always agree with her judgmental, brusque style. Henry James, while calling her "exceedingly ugly," still found her to be "the most intellectual person in Florence."² Walter Pater spoke of her style as "full of poetic charm" and "justly expression, sustained and firm--as women's style so seldom is,"³ and Robert Browning even paid tribute to her in his poem "Asolando" (1889):

'No, the book
Which noticed how the wall growths wave,' said he,
'Was not by Ruskin,'
I said, 'Vernon Lee?'

Lee was one of the most prolific aesthetic writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Her oeuvre comprises well over forty books.⁴ Although her interest in aesthetic questions places her somewhere between John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Henry James, the great variety of her subjects and styles goes beyond these influences so that George Bernard Shaw spoke of her as "the old guard of Victorian cosmopolitan intellectualism."⁵

For the most part of the twentieth century, however, Vernon Lee has led a marginal existence in literary history. Her name appears sporadically in anthologies of short stories or general theories of aesthetics,⁶ but most of her

books are out of print. Today she is best remembered for her fantastic tales, which have the psychological interest of, say Arthur Machen's "Great God Pan" or William Meade Falkner's The Lost Stradivarius.

Vernon Lee's absence from the literary canon to some extent seems to be the result of a fading interest in her work in the twentieth century but also reflects the complex interactions of aesthetic traditions and socio-political forces in cultural production. For instance, Lee's remoteness from the British market proved to be a disadvantage at a time when it was important for writers to keep in close contact with their publishers. Her inexperience with the "rules" of the market and her often undiplomatic conduct did not facilitate her literary career. Moreover, when she first came to London in 1881--a female writer with a male pseudonym--her "slightly foreign precision of vocabulary and intonation" and her social manners struck her English audience as odd.⁷ Her unconventionality was also reflected in her literary performance. She introduced herself not with a novel--the contemporary domain for female writers then--but with historical and aesthetic studies. For example, her first major work, Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy (London: W. Satchell, 1880), was considered "an amazing production for a woman, and especially for a young woman."⁸

At the same time, she confronted her critics with a variety of unconventional pieces of writing which often resisted distinct gender or genre categorization.⁹ Lee combines history, fiction, and philosophy in creative patterns to which she gave such names as "studies," "notes," or "fancies." Her impressionistic and sometimes rhapsodic style turns history into an experience of the senses and in this respect is similar to Pater's aesthetic historicism as, for instance, in his Imaginary Portraits.¹⁰

In any case, literary historians have had difficulty placing Vernon Lee within a certain genre or thematic category. Most often we find her ranked with Walter Pater or Henry James as an aesthetic writer of the late nineteenth century. Sometimes she has been read as a "singular anomaly," to use Vineta Colby's term, which means as a marginalized novelist, like, for instance Mrs. Humphrey Ward or Elizabeth Lynn Linton.¹¹ This epithet has made Lee something of an oddity in literary history rather than emphasizing her innovative achievements.

It is curious that today we identify Lee with an unfortunate novel and a handful of short stories although some of her art historical essays were considered remarkable, historically pioneering work in her time. The inclusion of "Lady Tal" in Elaine Showalter's recent Daughters of Decadence does not necessarily help to improve

Lee's reputation, for this story shows one of her less skillful literary "vengeances," in this case against Henry James.¹² Miss Brown and "Lady Tal" certainly provoked enough scandal in their time, but they are not necessarily Lee's strongest work. Lee's historical and aesthetic treatises, such as her Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy, Euphorion, and The Handling of Words are more important for the contemporary literary and aesthetic debates.¹³ These works, however, have long disappeared from the active book market.

Are we continually participating in canonical policies that automatically group women in certain genres? Do we not reinforce traditional patterns of literary reception when we identify a female writer only with a part of her work, namely the part that was considered women's domain, such as the novel? What does it mean, for instance, that a female writer like Vernon Lee or even George Eliot is mainly read nowadays for her fiction, whereas her essays are merely considered contributory? To what extent have women themselves participated in their marginalization? Even Virginia Woolf overlooks Eliot's role as an essayist, when she tries to demonstrate the masculine character of the genre in the past for her feminist cause.¹⁴

If we want to re-evaluate Vernon Lee's texts, then we need to extract them from too closely knit genre patterns

and group them alongside new questions of inquiry. Thus my study cannot be an attempt to reinstate her rank or "prove" her equality with her more established literary peers, for the underlying assumptions and the validity of such ranking has to be questioned at the same time. As Vernon Lee's literary standing seems to have been affected by the same mechanisms which have kept so many women writers of the past out of our view, I suggest that we read her works from a feminist perspective which investigates, for instance, how her female experience shaped her subjectivity, and how she could intervene in contemporary intellectual debates as a "female aesthete." Moreover, Vernon Lee's lesbian orientation has to be given special attention, as this "difference" not only shaped her alternative perception but also induced critics to marginalize her achievements.¹⁵

Writing about a nineteenth century middle-class lesbian writer, who moved across the lines of gender and genre as she moved across the borders of nations, involves the investigation of a whole range of questions concerning sex, gender, class, and nationality. We need to ask how Lee could establish a female (or rather: lesbian) subject position within the male-defined discourse of fin-de-siècle aestheticism. Male subjectivity was constructed as a universal or integrated self, whose opposite was not the female subject but rather a simulacrum, i.e. an imperfect

double of masculinity. Since language constitutes consciousness, female consciousness of self is, as Eileen Schlee puts it, like wearing "hand-me-down clothes" and as for "the new fashions of language . . . we can only borrow [them] anyway."¹⁶ Coincidentally, Vernon Lee also uses the trope of second-hand clothes in Euphorion to explicate the passing on of cultural texts from leading groups to subclasses, who stretch and patch up "high" culture until it looks like something of their own.

Lee, too, was constantly "wearing" and altering the texts of her contemporary models. She even acknowledged her emulation of a number of male writers until she found her own style in The Handling of Words.

I can recognize long preliminary stages of being not oneself; or being not merely trying to be, an adulterated Ruskin, Pater, Michelet, Henry James, or a highly watered-down mixture of these and others, with only a late, rather sudden, curdling and emergence of something one recognizes . . . as oneself. Whether that oneself is better or worse is neither here nor there. What I am driving at is only the fact that writers learn most from what they read, because the mind is not a Pallas Athena bursting full grown and in full dress from even the most Olympian brain, but takes its substance and shape mainly from what it feeds on.¹⁷

Lee employs the language of her peers but introduces alternative viewpoints. She challenges ideological premises by disregarding gender and genre lines. Therefore, this project will foreground, among other aspects, Vernon Lee's intertextual relationships.

As a lesbian, Lee had to express difference within a gendered system based on the binary opposition of heterosexual terms. Metaphysical language defined male and female as opposites but at the same time masked their hierarchical relationship in the social and historical context. Subjectivity was expressed in universal terms, yet it was read as male. Woman could only speak from a mediated position, which had to be voiced in a seemly rhetoric. As the not female, i.e. as an identity outside the hetero-patriarchal discourse, the lesbian was not representable in the dual gender system. But if the lesbian wanted to step out of her invisibility, she yet had to use the "visible" (conventional) signs of gender and recreate them in ways superseding the heterosexual (con)text.

Drawing on feminist and lesbian theories, this project investigates Vernon Lee's literary manifestations of lesbian subjectivity between the contingencies of symbolic conventions, literary history, and biography. After laying out the objectives of this approach, chapter one discusses Lee's shifting from a male-identified to a lesbian subject position in the narrative leap from Baldwin (1886) to Althea (1894). Chapters two, three, and four roughly follow this pattern of Lee's development and investigate her inscription of alternative subjectivity in three different genres--the historical essay, the novel, and the fantastic short story.

Each chapter shows how Lee progressively moves out of the restrictive gendered space assigned to her in the heterosexual context to a more independent, affirmative lesbian subject position.

Biographical Notes

We may ask what in Vernon Lee's cultural background explains her lesbian subjectivity. Lee was brought up in the first place to be a writer. From early on, she identified with what was considered a "male" career. She called herself a "woman of letters," and she was a match for many a male colleague in erudition and independent thought. Therefore, she was feared as much as she was admired. She was in the unique position of leading a "man's" life in a "woman's" body. From this double perspective she could deal with the question of male/female identity from a perspective beyond the traditional gender roles and thus point to the multiple cultural conditions of their construction.

It seems that the (con)text of Vernon Lee's literary and social life resists a "straight" conceptualization or classification within literary history. Her family belonged to what we may call the cosmopolitan intelligentsia who settled in the cultural centers of Western Europe during the nineteenth century. In her early youth, Vernon Lee's family was constantly moving between France, Germany, and Italy.

The unstable life-style did not provide a sense of "home" and prevented her from establishing lasting ties with a certain community or larger collective.

The Pagets' financial situation seems to have shifted from time to time, but they were always more or less able to rely on governesses, footmen, or servants. There was money in Mrs. Paget's family derived from an extensive business in the West Indies. Matilda Paget was entitled to a share of the interest from her father's estate, which, as a result of her family's poor administration did not always flow to her in regular intervals. The family's economic position apparently was not as sound as Lee tries to make it appear. Her constant fretting about publishing fees and making a living from writing in the letters to her mother, shows that she was by no means immune from material concerns. Her battles with the publishers also reveal that she was trying hard not to sell herself under value or let herself be pushed into a position of powerlessness. So it is with a certain triumph that she tells her mother (in 1887) that she refused to write an article for the Fortnightly because she was given only 13 days notice, or (in 1891) that "[she] will not accept only £20 from Unwin" for her stories.¹⁸

But her financial struggles did not put her on the brink of poverty. We can take her literally in the letter to her half-brother Eugene in the summer of 1893 that she could

"lack, at most, only luxuries." In this letter she claims, for instance, that she did not have to depend on her writing for a living.

On the other hand I consider that in a world where so many clever people (especially in England) have to write to suit the public from sheer lack of money, it would be shocking for me, who could lack, at the most, only luxuries, to do such a thing. Of course it would be a bore if my writing ceased to bring in anything at all; but I think it better to restrict my expenditure than to increase my income.¹⁹

In the Salon-like surroundings of their homes in Rome and Florence, the Pagets generously hosted an illustrious set of cosmopolitan visitors. This decorum would clearly locate them within the educated upper-middle classes of nineteenth-century Europe.

On the other hand, Lee's upbringing differed considerably from that of other women in this social station. She was not educated for the domestic or marital life of a "typical" middle-class woman, but rather for an intellectual career. Lee was put into the care of various German governesses. At the same time, she was educated by her mother, who, as Lee remembers in The Handling of Words, always wanted her to be another Mme. de Staël and therefore had put her daughter through a demanding intellectual training.²⁰ Her sense of identity seems to emerge from this education as well as from the movements and places of her family's unique itinerary. Ideological determinants,

such as gender, class, or nation, are multiple and seem to intersect at unusual angles in her life. In an era which emphasized class and gender divisions as much as national identity, Vernon Lee's heterogeneous existence was bound to complicate her perception and performance.

In this respect, we may construe Vernon Lee's lesbian position as the space where the multiple cultural constituents of her life could meet and coexist. Lesbianism, if defined as a subversion of heterosexual cryptograms, could thus be read as the marker of that space in which alternative concepts can be imagined. Therefore, Lee's lesbianism cannot be regarded as a private matter, apart from her writings, and certainly not (as some have described it) as a handicap or constraint. On the contrary, Vernon Lee's lesbianism must be regarded as a "wordly" (Edward Said) and decidedly critical position, from which she investigated questions of cultural identity.

Her "failure" to align herself with one nation or one gender challenged contemporary values, which privileged clearly defined cultural entities. At the same time, however, she was writing with and within the symbolic systems of the Victorian middle class, who promoted these values. Vernon Lee was a writer who was very much a Victorian in her emphasis on moral standards and her belief in progress and improvement. In this role, she was a harsh

critic of innovative but "immoral" artistic movements and all forms of (male) egocentrism or self-indulgence. This stance did not protect her from some of the same foibles she was criticizing. But she also draws attention to her own language, which reveals an obsessive self-consciousness while it exposes ideological givens in contemporary discourses.

Like many writers of the aesthetic movement, Lee's early books investigate enthusiastically Italian history and art as she engaged in fin-de-siècle discussions on Aestheticism. Then, in the mid eighteen-eighties she became interested in social and economic reform movements, such as the Fabian Society, which inflected her earlier aesthetic creeds with a sympathy for deprived social groups. In connection with her growing consciousness of social inequality she also became supportive of the Women's Rights movement around the turn of the century. At the same time, until about World War I, she focused on psychological aesthetics and investigated and refined the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*) developed by the German aestheticists Fechner, Vischer, and Lipps. She also became a fervent advocate for pacifism during and after World War I, which gained her the regard of George Bernard Shaw and Olive Schreiner but estranged her from many other British friends,

such as H.G. Wells when she campaigned for a less hostile view of the Germans.

Lee was largely a "child of her time" although she transcended the cultural values of the late-Victorian society in many ways. Her life style as well as her writing brought her constantly in conflict with predominant social, political, and literary conventions. She was educated for a career as other women of her class were for marriage and domestic life. Thus, she had to face the difficult task of asserting herself in and against a cultural context that ascribed little value to professional and intellectual women.

Vernon Lee in Literary Criticism

Lee's assertion of an alternative perspective in a male-dominated society obviously was a challenge for those who identified with the hierarchies which the symbolic system generated. The rhetoric of some of the late-Victorian comments on Vernon Lee reveals a certain uneasiness and confusion, as well as an attempt to contain her "otherness" within the hetero-patriarchal discourse.

Contemporary criticism of Lee's work is as diverse as her writing. Sometimes her books are simultaneously praised and depreciated, for precisely the same reasons. Lee's first aesthetic treatise, Belcaro (1881), for instance, finds an

enthusiastic Cosmo Monkhouse (at this point still unsure of her sex), who thinks it rare to find "so much thought in so easy a style."²¹ Harriet Waters Preston, on the other hand, critiquing the book for the Atlantic Monthly, deplores it as a "rather scatter-brained declamation," which she hopes is only a youthful "fling."²² A similar division in opinions runs through the debates about Euphorion (1884). This collection of essays on the Italian Renaissance is applauded for its "well-defined ideas . . . clear impressions, and vigorous and persuasive sorts of writing,"²³ but at the same time rebuked for the author's confusion of "impressions with ideas."²⁴

The critics repeatedly note flaws in Lee's style and diction, such as repetition and carelessness in word-choice and sentence structure.²⁵ The comments also reveal that contemporary literary standards were far from unified. What some critics label as sheer incompetence, others welcome as innovative skill. Thus her Spirit of Rome (1905) receives praise and blame for the same aspects. The critic of the Times Literary Supplement deplores the unpolished character of her "notes" which are not even a proper book, but "200 pages of scattered adjectives and convulsed interjections."²⁶ Although the Academy critic describes Lee's style in almost the exact same words, he finds that "the essence and spirit of Rome breathes in these

disconnected and scattered leaves from an old diary. Each word is exactly the right and vivid one."²⁷

Her essays on cultural and historical issues were often measured against those of the "masters," such as J.A. Symonds, whose studies in the history of the Renaissance had obviously shaped the public's expectations. The Saturday Review critic, for instance, considers Lee's Euphorion clearly inferior to the work of Symonds, mainly because she did not read him--an intolerable mistake for a neophyte and a woman.²⁸ The most relentless critic, however, is W.J. Stillman, who calls her downright ignorant in matters of art and "absolutely devoid of aesthetic sense."²⁹

Lee's approach to history resembles Pater's aesthetic impressionism, which was designed and conceived as an art form rather than as empirical science. However, she did not maintain his purely aesthetic and intellectual style, but delivered a curious mixture of description and sensation, always making her own impressions palpable in the text. The critics generally find her a "worthy" disciple, but any deviation from her "master" invokes a frown. Her expertise in the Renaissance is ranked as highly as Pater's, but again, it is her style which supposedly makes her inferior to him, as it "has not the polish which endeared Pater to his readers."³⁰ Pater himself praises in Euphorion the "very remarkable power of style--full of poetic charm," but

at the same time, he separates Lee from the general achievements of her gender as he characterizes her style as "justly expression, sustained and firm--as women's style so seldom is."³¹ Critical comments on Lee's style, connected with complaints about her subjective view loom largest in the comments on her non-fictional texts. Ignoring Lee's profession that she did not intend to write "facts," the review of The Beautiful (1914) is symptomatic in calling the book fatally flawed in its neglect of "one important characteristic of aesthetic judgments, their objectivity."³² It seems that the readers of her essays were sometimes disappointed because they expected the linear and argumentative form of "scientific" writing. Similarly, history, art, and aesthetics were discussed in learned treatises that subjected the work to analytic scrutiny. Subjective impressions and evocative language were dismissed from this discourse as unscholarly. Lee's textual hybrids of the argumentative and the imaginative (or fact and fiction) did not satisfy advocates of realist and objective writing as "she seems to be losing her grasp on reality by stretching out into associations and accidental remembrances."³³

That Lee's writing on art and history was not intended to be "objective," can be illustrated by her response, or rather non-response to the German historiographer Karl

Hillebrand (to whom she had dedicated her eighteenth-century idyll Ottilie in 1883), who corrected several dates in the book, to make its chronology more probable. Here again, Lee completely ignored the "master" and the later editions of her book reflect none of his suggestions.³⁴

The more positive comments on Lee's writing focus on her "fresh and original contribution to the history of civilization and art," or ascribe to her a "distinguished place in that school of French and English writers called the 'literary Impressionists,'" based on her achievements in Spirit of Rome.³⁵ In fact, a good part of the literary debate seems to be divided over larger cultural issues--such as the question of impressionism or realism--with which Lee happens to be associated.

Whatever the critics' stance, no one denies Lee's sincerity or fervor for her subject. Even Virginia Woolf, who criticizes Vernon Lee's style as much too "slack and untidy," gives her credit for "her enthusiasm [which] is the most definite thing we take away from her writing."³⁶

The contemporary criticism seems less harsh in the reviews of her fiction. Except for the controversial Miss Brown or the critical The Ballet of Nations (1915), which was in radical opposition to the political climate of its time, most of her fictional works meet with the critics' general approval. Obviously, the genres of fiction offered

more space for unconventional styles and subjects and, on the whole, were regarded as more "appropriate" for women writers.

What Vernon Lee's contemporary critics share, in all their divergence, is a language that links its idiom of differentiation and classification to gender. Similar to the gender polarization in the contemporary literary and political debates, most notably in the controversies about the New Woman, there is a clear demarcation between those who favor Lee as a woman who "possesses a vigorous pen . . . unafraid to grapple with subjects women usually avoid," and the opponents who rebuff Lee with the most common stereotypes about female writers.³⁷ The reviewer of the New York Times Saturday Review of Books, for example, deplores her "careless thinking, not unusual in her sex in serious writing."³⁸ That thinking was conventionally regarded as men's domain, is evident in a review which speaks of Lee as "the ablest living woman-thinker."³⁹ Superficially, such a comment may appear as a compliment; but the differentiating gender slant immediately excludes women from the (more prestigious) male sphere and thus reinforces the gender hierarchy.

All these remarks show that Lee was the unhappy recipient of conjectures about gender that had wide currency at the time. In the intellectual debates of the late

nineteenth century, subjects, styles, and genres were categorized along the sex/gender divide. The positive traits in Lee's style are characterized in "male" term like "vigorous," "strong," or "masterful." On the other hand, she is said to lack the "manly" qualities of logic, unity, and synthesis. She is neither systematic, objective, realistic, economic, nor philosophical. Not only does she not have these desirable qualities, but she displays "female" deficiencies in abundance. So she is "wordy," "untidy," and "repetitious" with "too much detail" and side-tracking and on the whole, "too tedious to read."

Although Vernon Lee made herself a name as a "female aesthete," she was subject to the prevailing prejudice that women were not fit to write about art or history. Not only were they deemed unfit for scholarly work, but they simply did not have the necessary education and formal training. Vernon Lee was very much aware of this situation as she explains to Mrs. Jenkins, a friend of the Paget family, in 1878.

The Academy has been rather civil about my Fraser article. It has found out (Heaven knows how) that Vernon Lee is not a real name and put it in inverted commas. I don't care that Vernon Lee should be known to be myself or any other young woman, as I am sure no one reads a woman's writings on art, history or aesthetics with anything but mitigated contempt.⁴⁰

Anything from a woman's pen in a scholarly field would be treated with extra skepticism. So much more remarkable,

then, that the reviews of Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy (1878), published when Lee was twenty-four, were so positive throughout. Or were the reviewers only so generous because the eighteenth century had been a neglected period, on which nobody had done any important work yet?⁴¹ Lee's later books on historical, aesthetic, and ethical questions were reviewed less benevolently. Not only was she measured against the achievements of her first book, but her studies of more current topics, such as the Italian Renaissance, put her automatically in comparison and competition with her better-known (male) peers.

Whereas Pater's and Symonds's reputation prevailed, Lee's name fell into oblivion. After her death in 1935, only a few of her books were republished, mainly her ghost stories for which she has gained a reputation in reference books or anthologies of fantastic fiction.⁴² Her philosophical and historical essays, which constitute the bulk of her oeuvre, have seldom found a publisher's interest in the twentieth century.⁴³

There seem to have been sporadic periods of renewed interest in Vernon Lee. The earliest larger study of her works, published in 1932, by the Swiss scholar Max Bräm, compares the Renaissance concepts of Vernon Lee, John Addington Symonds, and John Ruskin. The thrust of Bräm's study, written under the auspices of a general longing for

strong leadership and consolidation in the late Weimar Republic, goes towards a unified image of the Renaissance, which, according to Bräm, Lee fails to provide. He therefore ranks her as inferior in comparison to Symonds and Ruskin.⁴⁴

In 1952, after a twenty-year period of silence on Vernon Lee, an article in the Colby Library Quarterly announced that "thanks to Miss Irene Cooper Willis, of the Inner Temple, London, the Colby Library has received the private papers and correspondence of Vernon Lee (Violet Paget)."⁴⁵ The first to make use of these papers was Burdett Gardner whose dissertation, Vernon Lee: Lesbian Imagination Victorian Style (1954), however, was not published until 1987.⁴⁶ Gardner's book is packed with information; he managed to interview over twenty persons who had known Vernon Lee; he ploughed through her vast correspondence and read her 43 books. Unfortunately, his questions are too reductive (for instance, "what effect did her neurosis have upon her entire literary product?"), and his whole approach is marred by the rampant homophobia of the 1950's.⁴⁷ He re-marginalizes Lee by subsuming her formidable literary qualities, her wit, and imagination under his prejudiced notion of "lesbian neurosis."⁴⁸ Gardner insists that Lee's deprivation of maternal love--her mother idolized Lee's half-brother Eugene and excluded the

daughter, who yet was encouraged to strive for excellence-- led to her formation as a lesbian. He reads her texts as direct expressions of her "great psychic handicap (38)," as, for instance, her story "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," which to him is an encoded version of Vernon Lee's "own sexual inversion." However, his work is one of the few extensive readings so far to correlate Vernon Lee's lesbianism and literary style. Most other studies more or less ignore or play down the lesbian views in Lee's texts.

Peter Gunn's thorough biography of Vernon Lee pays more attention to her literary talent but, almost in reverse of Gardner's sensationalism, prudishly neglects her sexual orientation.⁴⁹ Gunn foregrounds the worship of Vernon Lee as a child prodigy, for him the main cause for her arrogance and egocentrism. However, he fails to relate her conduct to the historical climate of the late nineteenth century which was not very encouraging for intellectual women.

Vineta Colby's "The Puritan Aesthete: Vernon Lee" discusses her in the context of other (marginal) female novelists, such as Olive Schreiner, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and Eliza Linton.⁵⁰ For her study of Lee's fictional work, she draws on biographical material, and to some extent investigates her friendships with women, such as Mary Robinson, Ethel Smyth, or Kit Anstruther-Thomson. Colby is more critical of comments by Lee's contemporaries (Bertrand

Russell called her "a bloodsucker") than Gardner or Gunn. On the other hand, she repeats some of the formulas of past criticism--"of ebullient talent rather than of creative genius"--and also (still) reads Lee as an emulator of the great masters, most notably Henry James.⁵¹

In 1983 the scholars' interest in Vernon Lee was renewed through the appearance of Phyllis F. Manocchi's and Carl Markgraf's bibliographies. Gunnar Schmidt's extensive study of 1984 focusses on the literary representation of neurosis and hysteria in Vernon Lee's and Oliver Onions's supernatural tales.⁵² Schmidt applies Freud's psychological theories without qualifying their phallogocentric perspective. For instance, he uses the term "hysteria" uncritically, i.e. without questioning its etymological historical link with the female. Different from Gardner, though, Schmidt reads her texts intrinsically and ignores Lee's biography. Schmidt's universalizing terminology and the mechanical generalizations, typical of many critical studies in the early-seventies, sweep right over Lee's specific historical situation as a female writer in the late nineteenth century.

The most recent studies of Vernon Lee, which focus on her supernatural tales, are still blemished by the tendencies of earlier criticism. They either fail to contextualize Lee as a female writer, confirm her

inferiority to the "masters," or find her texts expressive of her "neurosis."⁵³ Even Carlo Caballero's "'A Wicked Voice': on Vernon Lee, Wagner and the Effects of Music,"⁵⁴ an interesting psychological aesthetic study that newly foregrounds Lee's musical interest, speaks patronizingly of her "emotional handicap" whose sources he finds, like Gardner, in her childhood.

Gender and Genre: the Dilemma of the Female Voice

In my reading of Vernon Lee as a lesbian writer, I will try to undo the distortions of modernist misogyny and nineteen-fifties homophobia which have kept her in some marginal, defensively constituted place in literary history for the most part of this century. Any current reading of Vernon Lee has to disentangle the vastly informative and intriguingly complex material of both her art and her life from the reductionist view of past criticism. Lee's writing seems less an expression of what Burdett Gardner calls "her delusion about her own nature," than a testimony of a woman who was passionately and primarily committed to her creative life in a culture that gave little credit to the intellectual achievements of women. As Virginia Blain puts it,

The lack of value ascribed to women by her culture and reinforced tenfold by her upbringing did Violet Paget

more damage than could ever have been undone by going to bed with one of her string of female admirers.⁵⁵

Lee's lesbianism is a complex performance between her rejection of conventional female roles and her self-construction as a male persona in her writing. On the other hand, her lack of reverence for masculinity complicated this male identification and undermined her sense of self. It is her ambivalence about her unfeminine identity rather than the repression of her "sexual inversion," which informs her often ambiguous texts. Vernon Lee's own statement (in a letter to her friend Mona Taylor in 1899) supports the assumption that her devotion to a career as a writer surpassed even the love of woman--as we may say in slight alteration of Lillian Faderman's terms.

Whether my work is worth anything or not, I must see to its being as good as it can possibly be made . . . Again I say that short of hurting her very much not twenty Kits [Kit Anstruther-Thomson, another "lover"] would be worth losing my serenity and intellectual elasticity. . . .⁵⁶

Neither Gardner's "pathological" study, Gunn's genteel repression, nor Schmidt's downright "omission" of Lee's lesbian orientation can do justice to the complexity of her writing which has to be seen in connection with the historical forms of other interlocking cultural systems like gender or class and the literary trends of the late nineteenth century, which colored Lee's language and metaphors. By taking Lee's images at face value, Gardner not

only ignores the complexity of literary production processes, but clearly overlooks her own assumptions and postulates. He neglects Lee's continual battles with the most pervasive dualisms of her time, such as fact and fiction, imagination and reality, through the full 592 pages of his study. Moreover, his one-sided sexual view of Lee's persona ironically makes him prove once more what Lee criticized in male perspectives of her own time, i.e. the singular identification of women as sexual beings.

What is indeed lacking today is a comprehensive study which investigates how Lee's lesbianism can be connected with her text, or, in other words, how gender and genre, sexuality and textuality intersect. Martha Vicinus's recent essay, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?" is an example of a reading that foregrounds such questions. Vicinus analyzes Lee's use of the boy image in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" in the context of other lesbian writers, such as Michael Field or Renée Vivien. Her study throws new light on a whole network of lesbian metaphors, particularly in their relationship to male homosexual language, which, as Terry Castle has pointed out, has always overshadowed lesbian discourses.⁵⁷

Castle's attempt to retrieve the lesbian from her invisibility and bring to light her many-sided cultural participation, opens a path for a broader understanding of

lesbian writing. Similarly, Virginia Blair's proposal to emphasize Lee's "over-invested male identification" rather than the "repression of her lesbian tendencies" leads away from reductionist readings of lesbianism as anomaly. This view also seems more relevant for Lee's writing. Lee frequently rewrites male texts (namely those of her "mentors" Pater and James) or slips into the role of male narrators while she recasts traditional male and female images. To some extent, her often unusual cultural "redefinitions" remind us of Monique Wittig's lesbianization of classical mythology which changes the primary signifiers within a cultural field. Wittig (in *The Lesbian Body*, poem 11) evokes and lesbianizes a scene of heterosexuality on Cythera, an island of the Aegean sea with a magnificent temple to Aphrodite.⁵⁸

In similarly complex textual operations, Lee reveals the cultural construction of gendered images and points to their multiple identities. She questions any single definition of meaning as a manifestation of prevailing hierarchies or power structures.⁵⁹ At the same time, Lee recasts images of the female in history and mythology. Snake ladies, femmes fatales, pagan goddesses, Pre-Raphaelite beauties, Euridyce and Heloïse, they all are dressed down and dressed up again differently from their conventional depictions. In her (de)constructions of male-invested

discourses, Lee is searching out alternative subject positions in the context of aesthetic and historical writing. Through her criticism of gendered dichotomies in contemporary narratives as well as in social reality, she establishes what we may call lesbian subjectivity while undermining the notion of the subject itself. To arrive at a new subject position, Lee has to contest the prevailing epistemic system and a kind of *Stiltrennung* that separated fact from fiction, life from art.

To what extent the effects of *Stiltrennung* are still active today became evident when I put in a research request for Vernon Lee at a major German library. I had to pause before filling in the literary category. Here the German language came to my rescue; for the word *Schriftstellerin*--broad enough and still more sophisticated than the English "writer"--seems to come closest in summing up adequately the intelligence and versatility of Lee's writing. Common reference guides are equally insecure in the nomenclature, ranging from "essayist, novelist, or short story writer," to "critic" or "aesthetician."⁶⁰ The author of the entry on Vernon Lee in the Encyclopedia of British Women Writers, has no problems supplanting the annoying genre description altogether by a no-nonsense BORN-DIED-DAUGHTER OF-WROTE UNDER chart.⁶¹

Vernon Lee wrote fiction and non-fiction, often both in the same text; as Vineta Colby puts it, "in a sense almost everything that Vernon Lee wrote bore the stamp of fiction."⁶² It seems that Lee tried to circumvent and subvert simultaneously established literary styles and methodologies. As the author of argumentative essays and fictional narrative, she was constantly torn between different modes of representation. She brings this dilemma to our consciousness in her forewords and epilogues, full of criticism of the underlying mechanisms of inscribing and organizing knowledge, while she draws our attention to her own literary discourse.

There are three basic things which Lee finds wrong with the contemporary *Stiltrennung*, mainly in connection with her own preferred medium, the scholarly essay. First, she deplores its confinement to fact. Second, she criticizes the use of abstraction which homogenizes the subject unjustly. And third, she disapproves of the inbuilt hierarchies of the ideological system, which lead to constant contrasting and comparing for no other reason than to establish one view over another in order to reconfirm power structures.

More than a "circulating library distinction" (Northrop Frye), the opposition of fact and fiction played an important role in late-nineteenth-century literary debates. Frye's characterization of this dualism as a general

structural device points to its historical conception. With the rise of science in the nineteenth century the symbolic division between fact and fiction determines the way meaning is ascribed. This dualistic framework distinguishes between different modes of making sense and, thus, marks one of the pivotal points in the intellectual struggles over epistemic control.

Fact and fiction correspond to and are influenced by similar divisions, of which gender and sexual difference are prominent articulations. The double function of gender as a primary signifier for symbolic relationships of power and as a constitutive factor of social experience based on perceived differences between the sexes makes it a crucial site for ideological formation.⁶³ It invades and determines every body's [separation intentional] life and therefore is the general and the individual at the same time. Gender thus can be seen as the visible intersection of symbolic language and social reality, which makes it ideologically powerful.

As Vernon Lee points out in "The Economic Parasitism of Women," binary oppositions like fact and fiction are not disinterested but constitute value hierarchies although they never appear as such.

. . . therefore, we have obtained a primitive human group, differing most essentially from the group composed by the male and female of other genera: the

man and the woman, *vir ac femina*, do not stand opposite one another, he a little taller, she a little rounder, like Adam and Eve on the panels of Memling or Kranach; but in quite asymmetrical relation: a big man, as in certain archaic statues, holding in his hand a little woman. . . .(270)⁶⁴

Vernon Lee repeatedly discusses the function of dichotomies, such as fact and fiction, reality and fancy, past and present, and in the process exposes the underpinnings of the ideological framework which she also employs at the same time. In "Helena and Faustus,"⁶⁵ for instance, she presents the division between the real and the fantastic (another powerful nineteenth-century dichotomy), as symptomatic of contemporary modes of perception. She demonstrates that in earlier societies these distinctions were inconceivable, for the aesthetic conventions then agreed on a concept of reality, which did not privilege rational modes of representation. Thus, Marlowe's "spirits" were read as realities, whereas Goethe's were not.

In this story of Doctor Faustus, which, to Marlowe and his contemporaries, was not a romance but a reality, the episode of the evoking of Helen is extremely secondary in interest. To raise a dead woman was not more wonderful than to turn wisps of straw into horses . . . Goethe's Faust feels for Helen as Goethe himself might have felt, as Winckelmann felt for a lost antique statue . . . the essentially modern, passionate, nostalgic craving for the past.⁶⁶

Similarly, Lee questions contemporary assumptions about so-called objective categories. She holds that "objectivity" is often no more than a discursive pose, an aesthetic

consensus, which conceals the interestedness of a certain social group.

Her epistolary novel Louis Norbert (1914), for instance, revolves around the relationship between (objective) scientific and (subjective) fictional methods. In this novel--a series of letters between a young professor of archeology and the middle-aged dilettante Lady Venetia--Lee aligns different epistemic modes with contemporary gender stereotypes. On the one hand, we have the pedantic scientist, and on the other, the enthusiastic amateur woman, "whose imagination not only gallops but flies" (18). As soon as the reader has figured out the intersections and correspondences of gender and genre, Lee reverses the characters' roles. When their historical inquiry gets stuck, the professor invites the lady to "invent." She is outraged as if he made an indecent proposal--a comparison that is not too far-fetched, given that under their historical correspondence unfolds a delicate love affair. In her eyes, the archeologist not only betrays the scientific discipline, but also ridicules her serious interest in historical research. He manages to allay her anger by interpreting "to invent" as "to discover" in the original Latin sense. At the same time, he invalidates the distinction between fact and fantasy, history and fiction, and even reveals their hidden identity, "for a hypothesis is a scientific *invention* . . ."

(118). Their debate effectfully demonstrates that historical inquiry is always already determined by a certain interest and, therefore, inflected by subjectivity. In other words, history is "invention," and so, paradoxically, the concept of objectivity is in fact "fiction."⁶⁷

For herself, Lee designs an epistemic concept which transcends the contemporary subject-object divisions. She conflates reality and imagination, material and ideal in her notion of "things in our mind," which includes impressions, emotions, habits, as well as beliefs.

The things in our mind, due to the mind's constitution and its relation with the universe, are, after all, realities; and realities to count with, as much as the tables and chairs and hats and coats, and other things subject to gravitation outside it. It would seem, indeed, as if the chief outcome of the spiritualizing philosophy which maintains the immaterial and independent quality of mind had been to make mind, the contents of our consciousness, ideas, images, and feelings, into something quite separate from this real material universe, and hence unworthy of practical consideration.⁶⁸

Lee accuses idealistic philosophy of constructing the dichotomy of subjective and objective or, likewise, of mind and matter. In Euphorion, she questions Hegelian philosophy when she denies the validity of abstraction and universal truth which for her are only constructions of an "average" and therefore unreal. She feels constrained by universalizing and abstracting methodologies as they unjustly homogenize differences and therefore,

the art which deals with impressions . . . is the only truly realistic art, and it only, by giving you a thing as it appears at a given moment, gives it you as it really ever is; all the rest is the result of cunning abstraction, and representing the scene as it always is, represents it (by striking an average) as it never is at all.⁶⁹

Lee questions the authority of abstraction and at the same time, she repudiates the methods that are connected with it--such as contrasting and comparing--because "comparison evokes at once our innate tendency to find fault." Her point is that building judgment on such a precarious notion as abstraction is like a false claim, i.e. a claim for universal truth from a standpoint that can only be very limited as "we see only very little at the time" (Euphorion, I: 12). The term "innate" here refers to habitual intellectual strategies which automatically collapse difference into sameness (or abstraction), as she points out in her essay on "Tuscan Sculpture."

This feeling is typical of our frame of mind towards various branches of the same art, and, indeed, towards all things which might be alike, but happen to be unlike. Times, countries, nations, temperaments, ideas, and tendencies, all benefit and suffer alternately by our habit of considering that if two things of one sort are not identical, one must be in the right and the other in the wrong.⁷⁰

She finds the methods of contrasting and comparing too limiting as they "bring one side into full light and leave the other in darkness" (Euphorion, II: 224). Paradoxically, comparison obscures differences while it automatically puts

the compared subjects into a hierarchic relationship. In her own writing, then, she tries to avoid these mechanisms. For instance, she employs different intellectual positions not to show the superiority of one over the other, but to have them modify one another and to make visible what she considered flawed or limited views. In several of her essays in Belcaro (1881), for instance, she demonstrates that Ruskin's moral-theological reasoning on aesthetic questions leads to faulty assumptions. To bolster her argument, she employs Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics. Thus, she distinguishes between moral and aesthetic qualities (interestedness and disinterestedness) to reveal the underlying assumptions in Ruskin's cause-effect theorem. On the basis of her evolutionary model of art as an organic system which lives and dies of its own principles, she can dismiss Ruskin's moral vituperation of the degeneracy of certain epochs. By modifying different contemporary discourses--Aestheticism, Darwinism, and Ruskinian theology--Lee shows their interrelatedness while questioning their validity as absolutes. As she moves through these discourses in a citational manner, she speaks through the dynamics of their frictions and thus asserts her own voice.

For Lee the creative use of fact and fiction is closely linked with her blurring of genre types. In the preface to her idyll Ottilie,⁷¹ for example, she criticizes the

essayist's confinement through categories that bind certain genres to certain subjects. She complains about the "plight" of the essayist "tied up in the narrow little stable of fact." Just like "the superior creature called a novelist," she claims, the essayist has "a certain love of character and incident and description, a certain tendency to weave fancies about realities," and yet, "essayists must not encroach on the novelist's ground." She deplores the view that historical essays are not supposed to be written with the imagination of the novelist if they are to be taken seriously. And yet she finds that imagination and literary invention can render past lives "all the more true for being imaginary" than factual historical accounts. Ottilie, then, becomes a demonstration of a special mode of representation which we may call the historically imaginative.

In studying any historical epoch, in trying to understand its temper and ways, there rise up before the unlucky Essayist vague forms of men and women whose names he does not know, whose parentage is obscure; in short who have never existed and who yet present him with more complete notion of reality of the men and women of those times than any real, contradictory, imperfectly seen creatures for whose existence history will vouch.⁷²

In her historical portraits, Lee blends different narrative forms, to the effect that publishers have put some of these "hybrid" pieces into anthologies of historical essays as well as into collections of fantastic tales. An example for her mixed technique is "A Seeker of Pagan Perfection, Being

the Portrait of Domenico Neroni, Pictor Sacrilegus," which starts like a historical essay and then turns into a "story."⁷³

We should keep in mind that about two thirds of her oeuvre are essays--to use the term for a preliminary convenience of classification. Yet these essays vary so much in form, subject, and intention that the genre name becomes almost meaningless. Indeed, Lee called her pieces anything from fancies to dialogues to studies. If we want to group them, we might vaguely speak of her "learned essays" with a "personal" undertone as distinct from her "dialogues," which include several viewpoints, or her impressionistic travel sketches, full of her own remembrances. The early essays, Studies of the 18th Century in Italy (1880), Belcaro (1881), and Euphorion (1884), are more obviously designed in the fashion of such nineteenth-century models as Carlyle or Ruskin, but at the same time reflect the impressionism of Pater's imaginary portraits. However, Lee was never happy with the form of these essays as her afterwords and epilogues reveal.

"Neither fish, flesh, nor fowl,"⁷⁴ the essay has always been a hybrid form in the genre debates. When tracing the modern essay's history, the books direct us to what we may call its dual origins in Montaigne's philosophical-ethical "attempts" and Bacon's practical-utilitarian

instructions. Seventeenth-century contributors, such as Jonson, Milton, or Dryden, developed both formal and informal prototypes by turning the essay into sketch, dialogue, or argumentative address. The eighteenth century brought the briefer and less "learned" periodical essay, which was designed to entertain as well as to instruct. The "serious essay" and the "occasional paper," to use Addison's terminology, already mark the two poles of a hybrid genre which handbook rhetoric likes to represent as a bifurcated development. Thus we find on the "informal" side a large group of nineteenth-century personal essays, which are also autobiographically inclined. On the other side, literary history has listed the "formal" or critical essay, which comprises the literary review and the essay in criticism.

The debate on the origins of the essay masks the "given" of its masculine lineage, which Joel Haefner's "dual father theory" brings into the open.⁷⁵ The father system has assimilated the personal (feminine) traits into its own self-division. From the Romantic period to late-Victorian Decadence, male-dominated literary forms absorbed what was traditionally called the feminine element, without becoming accessible to actual women. Until well into the nineteenth century, essay writing was somewhat elitist in terms of gender and social class, i.e. it was performed by a small group of highly-educated men.⁷⁶ Virginia Woolf, in "The

Modern Essay," attends to the thorough masculinization of this genre in the past centuries although she may have stretched the point a little bit to accentuate her own feminist position. One has to wonder, for instance, why she does not mention George Eliot among the "great" nineteenth-century essayists.⁷⁷ In any case, it was not until the end of the last century that women claimed their own stake in this literary form.

Although women were underrepresented as actual writers, they became important as a growing audience from the eighteenth century onwards when essays were also written for the edification of women from the leisured classes. Leslie Stephen, an eminent essayist himself, found that "essays were lay sermons, whose authors condescended, it was supposed, to turn from grave studies of philosophy or politics to topics at once edifying and intelligible to the weaker sex."⁷⁸ If women took to writing essays themselves, male condescension could become paternalistic pedantry. For instance, J.A. Symonds's letters to Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) are full of hypercritical corrections--not unlike Karl Hillebrand's pedantic revisions of Ottilie. He speaks to her from the position of an angered father, whose precocious child should be less "cocksure" about herself (which in fact Symonds himself is here).⁷⁹

If the essay was traditionally man's domain, one may be surprised that its form has often been described with what may be called feminine attributes: open-ended, non-linear, personal.⁸⁰ The essayists' tendency to include autobiographical notes, then, should make the essay a seemly literary medium for women--we would think. And yet it is surprising that there have been so few female essayists in the past.

To some extent, the underrepresentation of women in this genre may be seen in the political implications of the publishing process, which tended to "edge women out" of certain literary fields.⁸¹ In mid-century, writing like other commodities had become subjected to the laws of the market. The role of the critics as mediators between artist and public was crucial as their judgments could either make or break a writer. If we look at the literary production process in nineteenth-century Britain, we find that the powerful machinery of publishing and reviewing was exclusively regulated by men.⁸² Women as a group were not in the position to define the nature of "good" literature, as they had never had any say in the production and distribution system. Tuchman and Fortis have pointed out that, when London became the center for the book market, women were even more at a disadvantage. The system was organized in such a way that the writers had to stay in

close contact with the agents of the big publishing houses, which also set the standards of writing. Because of their domestic duties, women generally could not afford to stay away from their homes for too long. Therefore, they often were not only uninformed about standards or latest trends, but also lost valuable business contacts.⁸³ Vernon Lee, for instance, was not constantly in touch with the London market, as her home was in Italy for most of the year. From 1881 onwards (the year she saw Belcaro through the press), she made annual trips to London to establish or rekindle important connections. How tiresome the necessary toil of networking could become is revealed in her letters home, which speak of financial worries, ailments, and fatigue.

But although the laws of the nineteenth-century book market played a significant role in keeping women out of certain literary fields, there are other reasons for the masculinization of the essay, which can be found in the assumptions about the genre itself. The essay was understood to employ experience, wisdom, and contemplation, all three not usually expected from the way women's lifestyles were organized. Similar to the *bildungsroman*, the essay was considered the site for the expression of the writer's actual experience and essential self translated into observations on life in general. The "universal" voice exuded an authority which established itself as a given

standard. Because of women's different status in the symbolic order, they could not identify with this universal viewpoint. If they did, it had to be an assumed position which created what feminist critique has called a "split vision." The female essayist had to write against herself for in the essay the writerly subject seems to be so much more crucial than, let's say, in the novel, where "universal" experience can be perforated and counterbalanced by other narrative factors. "Female essayist," when applied to a nineteenth-century author is thus almost an oxymoron, and we should keep in mind that the essay

was not to all intents and purposes within the woman writer's domain for the first three hundred years of its existence as a genre, and those women who chose the form in the last century did so within a decidedly patriarchal context.⁸⁴

It appears that little has been written on the subject of women and essays from a feminist perspective. Virginia Woolf may be the first one to address this aspect in order to express her uneasiness as a woman writer in this field. For Woolf, the essay is not significantly different from a good novel, as the essay's open form has just as much potential for revelation. She is mainly concerned with the defects of the personal essay, whose egotistical subject she often conflated with the male-ego.⁸⁵ The essay, she finds, generally allows the reader to indulge in personal egoism and speculation which would be out of place elsewhere. Woolf

sets the personal essay apart from the historical or philosophical treatise, as essayists need not really know anything about their subject. So they make the text a forum of "I think," "I feel" without meaning it:

Confronted with the terrible spectre of themselves, the bravest are inclined to run away or shade their eyes. And thus, instead of the honest truth which we should all respect, we are given timid side-glances in the shape of essays, which, for the most part, fail in the cardinal virtue of sincerity.⁸⁶

Woolf praises Pater's "pure" style (for instance, in the Imaginary Portraits) which brings a vision of his subject as a whole before the reader through the form of his material alone.⁸⁷ In her own writing, Woolf always directed the readers' glance away from herself towards her topic. As a "modernist," she discards the authorial "I" and replaces it by the communal "we," which is her theoretical ideal of the disinterested voice of the modern essayist and the community of "common readers" (or, in current terms, the fellowship of discourse).

This self-denying aesthetics has another origin in her resentment of the stigma of the carping female. She was critical of authors like Charlotte Brontë, because she feared that their self-conscious presence would reinstate the stereotype that women were too personal and therefore unserious writers. To avoid this redirection into the woman's space, Woolf withdraws her voice from the subject

position and shifts the task of signification to her material. But this procedure is not without its problems. As Deborah Pope has pointed out, the feminist denial of "self" would be translated in the rhetoric of the universal as the nonfemale (and therefore, male), and she would forfeit woman's chance of showing her face.⁸⁸

I have made this excursus on Virginia Woolf as an essayist because she was one of Vernon Lee's most outspoken critics. She resented Lee's uncontrolled language flow and untidiness, and particularly her unveiled subjectivity. It seems that Woolf's criticism here reflects her discomfort with female self-consciousness. She obviously sees Lee's subjective viewpoint as emulation of the male egocentrism which Woolf tried to neutralize through a kind of "androgynous" modernist style. It is peculiar, though, that Woolf does not acknowledge Lee's own battle against the male ego, as, for instance, in her essay on Nietzsche⁸⁹ or in her many diatribes against the French Decadents whose immersion into their own blown-up selves Lee considered immoral. At the same time, the discordance between Lee and Woolf may be read as a conflict between two generations of feminists, which implies that the older generation of women still had to assert themselves against a tradition that the later feminists no longer had to deal with. Carol Smith-Rosenberg gives a plausible explanation of the generation

conflict between Victorian and Modernist feminists in "The Body Politic."

As the New Woman of the 1920's and 1930's developed their new discourse, they divested themselves of older female-rooted discourses, those of Victorian matrons and of the first generation of New Women. The older discourses, by their specific attacks upon male power and by their very separateness, had affirmed women's political solidarity and the uniqueness of women's experiences. Ceasing to speak with these older female words, the New Women of the 1920's lost their ability to speak with the older women. The political solidarity of the successive generations of New Women slipped away.⁹⁰

We may have to ask whether Woolf was more concerned with her own "paternal" history, against which she tried to position her feminist approach. Before this background, she may have seen in Lee too much of the Victorian, and too little of her difference from that tradition. Therefore, it will be useful to take a closer look at Lee's own struggle with the "male ego" and her development of an alternative subjectivity.

As Lee worked in a field that was not considered a woman's domain, we should not be surprised that her early texts do not foreground femaleness or even a feminist position. Given the biased attitude towards "woman-thinkers,"⁹¹ she avoided any explicit references to her gender and so-to-speak tried to "pass" as a male writer, similar to the way some lesbian women seek to pass as heterosexuals.⁹²

In general, Lee's texts show the problem that all feminist or oppositional writing is confronted with, i.e. that critical discourse relies upon concepts and arguments derived from the the very traditions it criticizes. This complex dialectic in feminist critique of patriarchal values cannot, as Rita Felski says,

occur outside ideological and social structures in some privileged space, but constantly interacts with the very frameworks it challenges. The current equation of social and symbolic structures with phallocentrism and of the feminine with the marginal is unable to conceptualize adequately feminist practices, which cannot be seen as either authentically "feminine" or as passive reflection of existing patriarchal structures, but rather engaged in a much more complex appropriation, revision, and development of existing cultural frameworks.⁹³

Lee tries to circumvent being absorbed by a male-defined discourse, most obviously in the way she represents sex or gender. As she considers herself "generally human" ("*Homo, der Mensch*") rather than explicitly female, references to sex and gender are seldom overt and at times even conspicuously absent. However, given the implied male gender in the universal subject, Lee takes the risk of eliding her voice of difference by assuming a "generally human" position.

In late-nineteenth-century England, under the influence of French Symbolists and Decadents, and the newly developing psycho-medical discourse, literary language became more openly sexual than in earlier Victorian times. The new

sexual language was male-defined and autonomous female sexuality was only sporadically constructed, for instance, in New Woman fiction, which was dispelled from "high" art, ironically, because of the texts' overt sexuality.⁹⁴

Moreover, as the categories of sex and gender answered to the dominant heterosexual system, the avoidance of gendered language can be seen as the female writer's escape from this system of "sexual (in)difference," in de Lauretis's terms or in Irigaray's so-called "homosexuality".⁹⁵

Vernon Lee's castigation of sexual images in literature appears as overly "puritan" to a modern reader. She was indignant at any lewd allusions to sexual (male) desire for which she reprimands most harshly French Decadents and Naturalists, in particular Baudelaire, Maupassant, and Zola, whom she did not hesitate to call "filthy." She was more ready to accept the Naturalists, for the ugliness of their texts made the "stomach turn" before they could do any harm. Baudelaire's language she deemed dangerous, as she saw his immorality, posing as a new form of beauty, affect unconscious layers of the human psyche. If Lee herself expresses sexuality in her texts, it is highly coded. She indulges in sensual descriptions, such as in "Lombard Colour Studies" (Juvenilia), only when the context is "safe," i.e. when her evocations refer to nature or landscape. Her cautious use or avoidance of sexual representation, then,

can also be read as an intrinsic protest against what she saw as abuse of aestheticism.⁹⁶ Her aesthetic liberalism does not embrace the "fleshly school of poetry" (to use Buchanan's epithet), who in her mind abuse art to promote selfish masculine yearnings. Lee castigates the Decadents' lascivious language and their construction of the "oversexed" and maligned *femme fatale*. In her discussion of aesthetic purity, she repeatedly exempts writers like Baudelaire and Gautier, Swinburne and Rossetti. Her indignant attacks on the "mystico-sensual" poets makes it difficult for her to keep up her argument of the separateness of morality and art which forms the basis of her anti-Ruskinian essays in Belcaro. So she resorts to the "ut pictura poesis" debate and distinguishes between visual and verbal art. But her argument (for example, in "A Dialogue on Poetic Moralism" in Belcaro) appears strained as the reader senses that she constructs it in order to justify her aversion of the Decadents.

Lee sees no innovation in writers who have abandoned their moral servitude to God without taking moral responsibility as individuals and who, instead, have made themselves into gods.⁹⁷ She implies that a mere reversal of values cannot be innovative as long as it does not affect the male ego as universal point of reference.

Lee regards the foregrounding of the sexual in literature as "unhealthy" distortions of the male ego elevated into universal law. She criticizes not only decadent poets but also Nietzsche *en passant*, accusing him of building his philosophy selfishly on his contempt for human beings and his lack of communicative and constructive energy. She even considers Tolstoi's asceticism as unhealthy if understood as an exclusive life-ruling principle and only concedes it a moderating function supplementary to hedonism or pure pleasure.⁹⁸

Lee's equation of self-centered male discourse and sexual obsession becomes most evident in her fiction where sexual desire--although highly coded in socially acceptable motifs--is shown to rule her male characters' lives. Masculine desire for possession, knowledge, or any other form of control, is often presented in the form of sexual quest, as, for instance, in "Dionea" or "Amour Dure." These stories are told from the point of view of male narrators, who, blinded by both erotic obsession and fear of punishment, see women only in sexual roles. Their fixation imposes even on apparently indifferent females a sexual identity. Lee's female characters are restricted in their attempts to assume another identity outside the male-defined space, and their striving for autonomy leads to the final disaster which almost always involves the men's death.

In Lee's stories, sexual attraction is not represented as an essential or innate biological function, but rather as the interaction of uncontrollable forces aroused by culturally constructed gender images, which operate as visual and sensual stimuli. By presenting the images of woman as constructions of male minds, Lee alters the trope of the dangerous woman into that of the "unknown" woman, who has so far only been defined through her relationship to man as she explains in "The Economic Parasitism of Women."

For one of the paradoxes of this most paradoxical question is precisely that, with all our literature about *La Femme* . . . we do not really know what women are. Women, so to speak, as a natural product, as distinguished from women as a creation of men; for women, hitherto, have been as much a creation of men as the grafted fruit tree, the milch cow, or the gelding who spends six hours in pulling a carriage, and the rest of the twenty-four hours standing in the stable. (294)

Based on her assumption that no one knows yet what women are, Lee rather explores the workings of male minds under certain historical conditions and exposes the one-sided construction of mythical images of the female. In this respect, the alleged strangeness of her female characters appears to be less an essential quality of their being than the result of the absence of terms that would show them as something else than men's supplement.

Lee alleges that the fragmentary vision of the female also prevents men from recognizing their own identity, for

woman "is made in the image of man." As only a fragment of him, she cannot be his mirror of recognition. Lee's male characters cannot fully understand themselves as they cannot know the female, i.e. conceive woman in other than men's limited terms. In her "Introductory" to Althea, Lee wonders, "we can know even ourselves only very slightly; for knowledge means comparison; and what is there to compare with?" "We" seems to refer here to either men and women. Women cannot know themselves as they can only be compared to men, and men preclude any knowledge of themselves through narcissistic self-mirroring. Lee, then, points to the narrowness of men's views, sharpened by the sarcastic reference to Genesis in "made in our image." "Hence, we naturally imagine that everything is made for us, and that everything not made for us . . . must be made in our image" (xiii). Her use of "we" is ambivalent here. In the second "we," she speaks as the male subject, and her words can be read as an assumed self-inspection of "man." Lee seems to imply that masculine self-knowledge or subjectivity will remain incomplete and can lead to such "despair of men like Byron and Baudelaire" as long as it draws only on itself. She sees "the aridity of spiritual egoists, knowing no soul except their own, like Pascal" as the result of wearing themselves out "in the solitude of ambition" (Althea xvi). Therefore, any comparison ["for what is there to compare

with?"] can be nothing else than the worship of one side, the egocentric male self, which is at the same time, set up as the universal subject.

In a Lacanian sense, Lee sees the male ego as a delusion, an imaginary construction. It constitutes the ideal "I," the unified subject, which Lee sees as the (faulty) *modus operandi* by which the world is interpreted and ruled.

Because, so far as I can see, it is not sufficiently admitted that it is also the *modus operandi* of most grown-up so-called civilized folk, and has been of all established religions. There is nothing in the world but me, nothing at least of any importance, that is the beginning; nothing not for me, is the next step; nothing not like me; whence class arrangements, domestic and international morality, and the desire to reduce all persons to the same conduct and opinions . . .
 . . .⁹⁹

According to Lee, knowledge can only be meaningful if it is less self-centered and rather balances aspects of self and other. She gives an example of her philosophy in her character Althea, who embodies the "serenity of satisfaction with one's own . . . powers and opportunities of happiness extended to others." Althea is one of those "natures, who never making any claims for themselves, never go through the disappointment which underlies most *Weltschmerz*" (Althea xvii).

Vernon Lee claims to write as and for the general human ("genus homo") which implies that she seldom foregrounds

contemporary debates about the nature of gender or the equality between man and women. Rather than giving another definition of what woman are, Lee exposes underlying assumptions about the female in masculine thought from her ideal perspective of the "generally human." At the same time, however, Lee speaks from a woman's position. What we need to investigate, then, is how she can inscribe her voice and create alternative subjectivity in the "masculine" literary traditions without eliding herself.

She often uses what we may call a citational method, which combines various literary and scientific male discourses in an argument that opens possible spaces for a female voice. Lee does not simply quote other voices to buttress her own, but her particular orchestration of multiple discourses works as an organizing consciousness that can be identified as her alternate subjectivity. In "The Economic Parasitism of Women," for example, Lee "rewrites" Charlotte Perkins Stetson's Women and Economics for a European audience through influential contemporary male discourses (Darwin, Durkheim, Marx, Michelet). Through her male masquerade--ironically reflected in the term "parasitism"--Lee can simultaneously express her female viewpoint and point out the foibles of the male discourses she cites. Does Lee speak as a feminist here, or do we have to understand "The Economic Parasitism" merely as another

exercise in her rhetorical repertoire? How, then, are we to understand the term "feminist" in the instance of Vernon Lee? The question is large enough to require another chapter.

Vernon Lee: A Lesbian Feminist?

The term "feminist" needs some explication. Along with "female" and "feminine" it has become one of the working terms in modern criticism which requires constant re-definition or re-conceptualization. It is important to keep in mind that there is no unified "feminist" position, but a plethora of heterogenous viewpoints. Cora Kaplan, for instance, has pointed out distinctions between humanist feminism, socialist feminism, and psychoanalytically and semiotically oriented feminisms.¹⁰⁰ The smallest common denominator of these different approaches may be Toril Moi's definition of feminists.

As politically motivated critics, feminists will try to make the political context and implications of their work explicit, precisely in order to counter the tacit acceptance of patriarchal power politics which is so often presented as intellectual 'neutrality' or 'objectivity.'¹⁰¹

Moi disentangles a multitude of similar expression which are not always clearly distinguished. Thus she differentiates "between 'feminism' as a political position, 'femaleness' as a matter of biology and 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics" (117). For the time being I may

adopt her definition of feminism which will certainly need modification, not only to do justice to Moi's complex analysis, but also to provide an adequate methodological set for my study of Lee as a feminist writer. Feminist writing implies the assumption of an anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position, which involves a certain consciousness of female subjectivity, an awareness of the historical construction of gender relationships and one's own participation in them, and a desire for change. A feminist position that denies the unified subject of the male order needs to present itself in different terms, which may imply incoherence, fragmentation, multiplicity. However, a simple reversal of the implications of male subjectivity bears the danger of corroborating the binary structures in which subject perception occurs. After all, subjectivity enters the cultural text as an imagined position from which to control the "chaos." At the same time, feminist critics have pointed out that the modern denial of coherent identity is a "luxury" of a male tradition, in which the literary "sons" rebel against the overbearing subject of the "fathers."¹⁰²

It seems that feminist discussions nowadays are moving away from the postmodern denial of subjectivity towards a definition of different kinds of subjectivities as "shaped by a historically specific set of interrelations between socio-economic conditions and ideological and cultural

socio-economic conditions and ideological and cultural processes," as Rita Felski puts it.¹⁰³ According to Felski, female identity (and therefore a certain amount of essentialism) is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for feminist consciousness, which also involves an awareness of the possibility for change.

Any deterministic model of gender relations, for instance, can only explain existing patterns of socialization but it does not account for historical changes. Subject transformation is a major site of political change, which cannot occur without the former. In Lee's writing, a conscious propagation of feminist politics does not occur until the turn of the century through her essay "The Economic Parasitism of Women" (1902).¹⁰⁴

In this essay, Vernon Lee confesses her former reluctance to address the "Woman Question," precisely because it is the Woman Question and thus singles out women from the "genus homo." However, Stetson's book, Women and Economics has made her a "convert"¹⁰⁵ because it points to the socio-economic and, therefore, man-made construction of woman's role through her sex. When Lee explains her reasons for her having so far opposed the "Woman Question," she distinctly separates her opposition from that of other (male) adversaries. What made her hostile to the whole

question is the term "woman" itself, which reduces the female to a non-human species.

. . . the inevitable harping on what can or cannot be done by women, because they are not men . . . produces a special feeling . . . due to the one fact sex, while the other fact of human nature, the universal, chaste fact represented by the word *Homo* as distinguished from mere *Vir* and *Femina* seemed for a moment lost sight of. (266)

Lee's essay is one of the few in her work where she explicitly addresses a feminist issue, in a voice unmediated through fiction or aesthetic discourse.¹⁰⁶ "The Economic Parasitism of Women" seems to sum up and bring to consciousness the women's stories implied in her fictional text. Lee's argument draws heavily on her aesthetic experience and her wide reading in political economics during the 1880's and 90's. Here she investigates the way woman is positioned in society and emphasizes that the Woman Question can only be "settled" in connection with the economic question, i.e. the injustices inflicted upon people by the capitalist system. Lee engages in the women's rights debate from an economic point of view and blames the "evils" in society on the double standards created by the complicity between capitalism and its most outdated institution, marriage.¹⁰⁷

Like Stetson, Lee argues that because the education of the human offspring takes longer than that of any other species it has tied up women in the home for an excessive

amount of time during which she cannot provide for her own living. Her subsistence becomes the responsibility of the male species and consequently, the "Father" is constructed from a social necessity as the supporter and owner of woman and children. Now that education has become a public institution, however, woman is condemned to "semi-idleness" and she becomes an economic "parasite" exempt from competition and social selection.

Lee then turns around Durkheim's anthropological theory of the degeneration of the female brain throughout history to show that not natural causes but social circumstances are responsible for this alleged regression. She declares that by using a "man's" evidence, she not only avoids the suspicion of partiality. At the same time, she reveals the shaky grounds on which the argument is built. She argues against Durkheim from a Darwinian position, to show that women's so-called "degeneration" is the result of their adaptation to her limited and dependent status in the service of a single man. From an economic standpoint, Lee explains, this limitation is wasteful and deprives "the whole race" of valuable work force. Woman's confinement to housekeeping--for which the only qualification is to be female--she is excluded from professional competition and, therefore, from developing skills useful for the national economy. Thus, the progress of the nation is limited,

because only half of its potential workers are efficiently employed. The maldistribution of human work and wealth creates within the community a double standard of "virtuous egoism and rapacity." Man has to be greedy outside the home, because he has to be "a good father," meaning that he has to make enough money for the family. At the same time, the woman has to keep a certain standard of appearance in the home and in her appearance (which means i.e. to ask him for money) to create the impression that the husband's business is flourishing. In this way she cooperates with a system that maintains her economic parasitism.

The rhetorical strategy in Lee's argument is that she does not point out what woman would gain through emancipation, but how man would benefit from it. Lee presents the economic advantages from a male point of view and thus lends her argument the relevance, which a woman's voice would not have been granted at that time.

Lee's circumspect argument comforts even those souls who fear for moral decline through women's emancipation. Equality with men will not deprive women of the positive characteristics of femaleness--such as gentility or unselfishness--because these traits are also inscribed as "general human virtues," for instance, in religion. What women will lose, though, is their exclusively sexual identity, which is defined in relation to man. Whereas men

can relate to one another in different functions--comrades, competitors, enemies--women are stuck with their sexual role. By detaching "femaleness" from sex, and therefore from the eternal biological bind, Lee clears the path for change. Economic independence will change women's existence and make them less attractive to men. But because of the relationality of gender--"man in the image of woman, and woman in the image of man"--Lee is sure that "those men will change, too (295)." If it can be assumed that woman is not an unvariable sexual type, man need no longer be afraid of those "men-destroying monsters [who] do everything to make themselves agreeable." Sexuality may lose importance altogether when women become economically independent and they no longer have to appeal to men only through their sexual powers. Lee traces the image of woman as "oversexed" from the story of Eve to the modern French novel as an expression of man's guilt projected onto the perpetual vision of *La Femme*. The very qualities of the female which the opponents of emancipation would like to preserve are simultaneously the ones which constitute the eternal "evil" of the *femme*. Again, Lee turns to Darwin when she shows how cultural control has kept women out of the process of social selection, so that nobody can know what they "really" are and they remain "the last scientific survival of the pre-Darwinian belief in the invariability of types" (295).

Lee compares women to organisms who have developed their present state through a series of adaptations to their cultural environment. For instance, she sees the "masculine" Englishwoman simply modeled on the "out-of-door, athletic, sporting, colonising Englishman," whereas the "ultra-feminine woman belonged, quite naturally, to the effeminate (French) man" (296). Women, when seen in other than marital relation to men, then, are required to be "not unlike but like himself." And so she sees a "family resemblance, after all, between the men and women of the same country" (295). Lee here links visual appearance with social Darwinian notions of "change, of adaptation, of evolution," in order to show that gender is a cultural (national) construction and not an "eternal type." At the same time, she emphasizes her own "different" cultural background ("living, as I do equally among Latins and Anglo-Saxons"), which puts her in a position to look behind or beyond the national masquerade. The rhetorical strategy, which implies moving a cultural phenomenon (gender) from a metaphysical frame of reference into a historical one, seems symptomatic for Lee. Her conception of gender identity depends on the "habits and preferences" of civilisations, in which national identity is an important determining factor.

"The Economic Parasitism of Woman" reveals to some extent Lee's position as a feminist. She juxtaposes

contemporary assumptions about women in order to show their innate contradictions and to reveal the grounds of their cultural construction in the patriarchal text. Although Lee calls herself a "convert" in the *Woman Question*, she does not speak from the same space as Stetson whose book focuses on sociological and political questions. Lee, on the other hand, approaches feminist issues rather in terms of their literary and historical representation. She sets out commenting on Stetson's book as literary critic, not as feminist. Lee uses the feminist standpoint of Women and Economics in a polemical argument that presents the demands of women as coincidental with men's interests. At the same time, she analyzes the role of literature, art, and science in helping perpetuate an undesirable economic state. By pitting against one another various discourses in late nineteenth century Western capitalism (such as Darwinian evolutionism, socialism, anthropological racism, and Nietzschean *Übermensch* philosophy) she deconstructs these discourse through their own implications. She does not even have to vindicate the legitimacy of women's demands, because it emerges directly from other (male) arguments themselves.

For, to such readers as have reason (perhaps owing to their superior knowledge) for giving much weight to similar statements about prehistoric civilisations; and to such readers also as feel that the fact of having possessed any particular desideratum in the past constitutes a better claim to its possession in the future, to both these classes of readers, it must be

much more satisfactory to be assured of the original and primeval importance of womankind by M. Durkheim . . . than to take it on the authority of Mrs. Stetson herself, who, of course may be suspected of partiality (274)

Always in favor of "showing" instead of "telling", Lee uses this principle to steer the reader's attention away from the female speaker to the "universal" argument in order to convince a potentially critical audience.

Only at one point does she break from her detached, matter-of-fact position and becomes the angry female. When accusing the French novelists of presenting their own version of woman as her "eternal" universal type, Lee speaks in the overly indignant tone for which she was criticized in Miss Brown. This passage on French writers is also the least convincing in her otherwise sophisticated and shrewd argument. Lee argues more intuitively than analytically when she tries to show how the aesthetic representation of women in literature intersects with their socio-economic position; but then, does not fully work out this connection.

At the end, Lee redirects her intricate thought system, built on a somewhat materialist base-superstructure model, into an aesthetic image. After she has prepared the ground with such clever arguments, it seems a little unsatisfying that she fails to show how exactly aesthetic and economic functions of gender correlate. On the other hand, she makes clear throughout the essay that she does not see it as her

task to "solve" the Woman Question or offer solutions. She rather points to a crucial premise of the question, which is that we cannot know what women are. In this respect, it makes sense that she (dis)places the feminist issue in the realm of aesthetics where woman can be re-imagined.

Returning to my initial question whether we can regard Vernon Lee as a feminist writer, I am still hesitant to do so. I understand feminism as a political form of consciousness raising from a "discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position."¹⁰⁸ Even in "The Economic Parasitism of Woman," I do not see such an evident political concern in Vernon Lee. In most of her texts, the gender question appears hidden under multiple symbolic layers. Her treatises on aesthetics, history, and philosophy are often too remote from the contemporary political or feminist debates.

On the whole, Lee seems to have "lived" feminism more than she expounded it. She was an erudite and independent thinker, whose "singular anomaly" was that she was "trained for art and literature as most girls of her generation were trained for marriage or domesticity."¹⁰⁹ She was a lesbian woman of letters with a sharp tongue and an income of her own. From her biography we get the impression that she fitted the image that many Victorians had of the independent, "mannish" New Woman; Bertrand Russell's crude

remark is symptomatic, "she was a woman of almost unbelievable ugliness and probably never aroused desire in any man. . . ." ¹¹⁰ However, in the New Woman debate, rampant in the periodicals around the turn of the century, her name is most noticeably absent, and we will also look in vain for Vernon Lee in recent works on the New Woman. ¹¹¹

This omission of Vernon Lee from the panel of feminists seems to be based on her absence from the contemporary feminist debates. However, we have to consider her reluctance to speak on the Woman Question as a manifestation of a kind of feminism on her own terms. Lee supported the feminists' cause and spoke in favor of women's right to vote. However, she was critical of the suffragists' language and strategies which she found too closely modeled on male styles. ¹¹² Her intention to speak for the "generally human" was meant to transcend gender, an ideal which she saw threatened when gender drew too much attention to itself.

Thus, we need to look for less ostentatious expressions of feminist consciousness, in other words, we need to accentuate the "poetics" of feminism rather than the "politics." Nevertheless, it is important to reconceive Vernon Lee in the first place as a female writer; as yet she has hardly been treated as one in literary history. Since her first book Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy appeared in 1880, she has been regarded as a somewhat

lesser male writer and measured by the standards her peers have set. In this respect, her literary identity has been framed or mediated by a male-defined canon whose validity has become the target of feminist criticism in recent years.

Lee shows a certain awareness of this "framing" of the female writer in her time, and she mimics this situation by building around her main texts lengthy introductions and epilogues, in which she criticizes the givens of dominant intellectual traditions and discusses the difference of her own writing. These "frames" have to be read as integral parts of her main texts as they provide the readers with the lens necessary for recognizing the *virtus dormitiva* of an alternative, female subtext. The consistent neglect of these subtexts by literary history shows that the hidden meaning is not easily accessible but has to be extricated from its complex entanglement with the master text.¹¹³ Through the framing text, she becomes her own commentator, a mediator between herself and the reader, text and subtext, and particularly, between her own implied subject positions. Lee thus constructs a female subjectivity, which not only denies the unified subject of liberal humanism, but also promotes an awareness of the irreducibility of difference. In Kristeva's terms, Lee constructs "the stranger within," i.e. an identity that faces its alterity, difference, and otherness.¹¹⁴ We find the most obvious configuration of

Lee's alternative subjectivity in her dialogic essays,
Baldwin and Althea.

Lesbian Subjectivity: From Baldwin to Althea

The introduction to Baldwin can be read as Lee's scarcely veiled autobiographical account of her writerly "self." Baldwin is presented as a friend "on the borderline between fact and fancy." She describes the interrelated forces which have shaped his (and Lee's) persona in terms of history, education, gender, and the "genius of the place" (to use one of her own expressions). What the reader receives at first, is a somewhat exteriorized character study, made up of loose abstract impressions rather than essential features of a coherent personality.

This abstract personage, to whom life has been scarcely more than a string of abstract experiences and resultant ideas, has two further peculiarities, that complete, so to speak, his abstract personality . . . The accident of education, carried on exclusively at home and in exceptional solitude, has placed this not very feminine man to some measure at a woman's standpoint, devoid of all discipline and tradition, full of irregularities and individualities
 (Baldwin 4-5)

Baldwin's education, of which Lee is "unable to give any very definite account," is yet the clue to his personality. She represents this education in allegories, "as Pueritia reading a grammar book, Adoloescentia holding a hawk," which remind us that the content of learning was designed for

boys, underlined by Lee's characterization of Baldwin as "a sentimental boy, a harshly philosophic youth." However, his learning was carried on "exclusively at home" as was customary for girls, and this is one reason why Baldwin has been placed "at a woman's standpoint."

Lee here constructs an abstract subjectivity that is yet determined by specific individual circumstances, namely by the intricate relationship between male and female features. Lee uses for Baldwin the epithet "feminine" to describe a gendered style, which can be seen as different from the biological determination "man" and still different from the social space, marked by "a woman's standpoint." For Baldwin, gender is one of the constituents in the shaping of social and symbolic styles rather than a "natural" essence. We recognize him as "man" through name and personal pronoun, i.e. his sex is determined by symbolic conventions. But as he is at the same time positioned "at a woman's standpoint," signifier and signified do not coincide. Gender is a factor that is implemented and recognized by his social environment. But at the same time, his life, like "the wool of a sheep" (a metonymic representation of Baldwin's self) hangs "flakewise" on every part of his very real Italian environment. Whereas Baldwin's cultural constituents, such as gender and nationality, are inconclusive--he is an "English Briton" who was "born upon French soil" and

"vaguely remembered Germany"--his aesthetic home of the Italian "genius loci", gives him a more defined sense of identity.

It is the only place I have possessed in absolute familiarity . . . the only place where I have been obliged to take an interest in, or rather within whose limitations I have had to find everything . . . the complete intimacy with every turn, every path; the interest in the fern growing on certain walls, in the scarlet mushroom on a particular bank skirting a beech wood; the historical mania and fancies evoked by a few scaps, a tower, an old piece of wall, a graven hand on a milestone. (Baldwin 3-14)

Baldwin's gender, nationality, and local identity are woven into a costume which is "corporeal" to him. Gender is his connection with the world, but as it is accidental and "devoid of all discipline and tradition" its function is variant and not fixed. He is the homology of an identity that cannot (yet) be expressed, an identity which constantly desires but that all the while has to renounce. He projects desire without end and thus is in a state of continuous unfulfilment. Baldwin cannot be described and so Lee has him speak for himself:

But making me what? The usual story: many ingredients, much fussing, and a result how out of all keeping! A creature troubled with the desire to create, yet able only to criticize; consumed (which is worse) with the desire to affirm, yet condemned to deny; a life spent in being repelled by the exaggerations of one's friends, and attracted by the seeming moderation of one's enemies, in taking exception in the midst of assent: scepticism in a nature that desires to believe and rely, intellectual isolation for a man who loves to be borne along by the current--an unsatisfactory

state of affairs, yet to me the only one conceivable.
(12-13)

Lee's idea of subjectivity in Baldwin is based on aesthetic impression as well as on the tension between desire and restraint. Her subject is a process of collecting likenesses as the epigraph from Emerson on the title page to Baldwin suggests

A man is a method, a progressive arrangement, a selecting principle, gathering his like to him wherever he goes.

If Baldwin is Lee's exteriorized image of her subjectivity, a double of her writerly self, she still insists that she is distinct from him. What exactly is the relationship between Lee's writerly self and Baldwin? It seems that we can approach the answer once more through her motif of education. Towards the end of her introduction, the focus is not on Baldwin's learning but on that of the writer Vernon Lee.

My own relations towards him? . . . They are absolutely indefinable. I am the pupil of Baldwin, the thing made by him, or he is my master, yet made by me; choose and understand, for I cannot. I agree in all his ideas; yet I can place myself at the point of view of some of his opponents . . . And yet, Baldwin and I are distinct; he does not understand me quite; he stands outside me; he is not I. No, dear friend Baldwin, better far than I and wiser, but perhaps a little less human, you are not myself; you are my mentor, my teacher, my power of being taught; and you live, dear abstract friend on the borderland between fact and fancy. (14)

Lee's hide-and-seek game with her writerly identity here becomes a complex act of self-mirroring when she changes her

point of view in the middle of this speech to address Baldwin directly. Baldwin thus has at least three different voices: we encounter him as a third person, an addressee and, speaking for himself, also as a first-person "I." At the same time, Baldwin and Lee form a "we" ("Baldwin and I").¹¹⁵ Their sameness and difference in one, which has no essential or fixed "core," constitutes subjectivity in the act of reading, illustrated by the dialogues that follow the introduction.

One should also note the ambiguous use of passive voice as in "he is my master yet made by me" or "my power of being taught." If we scrutinize the semantic logic of these phrases, the relationship of subject and object begins to shift, and we are no longer sure, who is the agent. This phrase summarizes in a way Lee's notion of her own subjectivity and, at the same time, reflects the dynamics of the construction of subjectivity itself.¹¹⁶

Baldwin embodies what Lacanian theory outlines as the entering into language (the symbolic). It is through (phallogentric) language that the child learns to recognize itself in a series of subject positions and develops a sense of self. This learning process is visualized in Baldwin who is a likeness of Lee's writerly self, which is also the subject of her discourse, distinct from the "I" who speaks. Baldwin personifies the consciousness which is constructed

by language and which is here given name and gender. But this consciousness is in conflict with "woman's position," an incongruency which produces inconsistent and shifting subject positions, "an illusive, shimmering personality, seemingly full of contradictions (13)."

Through Baldwin's construction, Lee draws attention to her own discourse. Her charade of Baldwin's indefinite gender position and his strange doubling of Lee's self leave the half-conscious impression of a divided identity in the reader's mind, with which she/he will read on. Thus Lee's text cannot be read from a unified or "universal" point of view. As Baldwin's life "hangs flakewise" on the land, the Baldwin-Lee double "hangs" in every dialogue, further inflected by the other characters, who interact like the voices in a musical round. If we read the introduction carefully enough and keep in mind how Vernon Lee sees her relationship to her characters, we may recognize in them other aspects of her own subjectivity.

I have felt like Vere, I often feel like Rheinhardt, I respect Agatha, I do not utterly despise Marcel, I love and am dazzled by the beautiful transcendalist Olivia . . . (13)

We should note how the affiliation between Lee and imaginary figures is expressed in the verbs. These verbs ("respect," "despise," "love") signify relationships that differ from the intellectual, conscious mode of the Baldwin-Lee

connection, here represented by "I agree in all his ideas." Thus the dialogues, apart from their expression of ideas, represent at the same time a matrix of subject positions, which may be inconsistent or even contradictory and in this aspect they become illustrations the second epigraph on the book's title page:

"And if I contradict myself, why, I contradict myself."--

Walt Whitman

But if we read Lee's dialogues not only as intellectual debates, they direct us to the multiple constituents of her language. Baldwin can be read as a homology for Lee's consciousness as a female writer--a self-contradictory, abstract, but enthusiastic "denizen of the subjective world"--in the early years of her career as a "woman of letters." Lee's Baldwin personifies a kind of man-woman, a "borderland" figure who reflects the division of her writerly self from all trends and traditions, a division that even runs inside her own personality.

In her second books of dialogues, Althea, Lee replaces her "dear abstract friend" Baldwin by Althea, "who is naturally the pupil of Baldwin."¹⁷ Baldwin, she tells us "has ceased to exist."-- Why? --"He belonged like so many of our dead selves, of the youthful predecessors of our identity, to a genus of ephemeræ which require an universe without rain, wind or frost, in fact, made on purpose for

them" (xi). This ambiguous phrase suggests that Baldwin signifies her earlier male-invested identity so that the phrase "a genus of ephemera which require an universe with rain and wind or frost," can be read as an allegorical circumscription of the universal subject constructed in the (male) sphere of abstraction. The Latin word "genus" has more than one translation and can be understood in two ways here, as "kind" or "species" and as "gender." Moreover, the last part of this phrase, "made on purpose for them," is not unequivocal either because of its unclear pronoun reference. Grammatically, "them" can refer to "predecessors of our identity" (i.e. "our dead selves"). If we read the "predecessors" as a synonym for the male subject, then the phrase implies that this subject has constructed itself in and with its own atmosphere.

Baldwin's "old" subjectivity is contested by Althea, whose notionless language embodies a new kind of consciousness that is not absorbed by a symbolic system with an inbuilt male subjectivity. The reference to Althea's language of instinct at the same time, recalls Lee's characterization of herself as an aesthetic critic in Belcaro, where she asserts that she understood (felt) art before she learned the "foreign" language of art criticism.¹¹⁸ Althea is

at first, inarticulate, unreasoning, ignorant of all why and wherefore, and requires to be taught many things which others know. But, once having learned the names, so to speak, of her instincts, the premises of her unconscious arguments, she becomes, as necessarily, the precursor of Baldwin's best thoughts, the perfecter of most of them (Althea xvii).

Through Baldwin's "death," Althea becomes the living center of Lee's dialogues. Baldwin is moved from a shifting and vague reality to the more "solid existence of imaginary beings," in other words, he has become one of Lee's mind-building components of the past. However, he is still partaking in the Althea dialogues and thus represents Lee's earlier state of consciousness named Baldwin. With Althea as a new figure of identification and with Baldwin still present, Lee somewhat historicizes her subjectivity in a diachronic/synchronic conflation that reminds us of Pater's concept of history. However, different from the refined Paterian artist-critic, Althea's subjectivity is unrefined and intuitive and yet superior as she becomes the "precursor of many of Baldwin's best thoughts, the perfecter of most of them."

If Baldwin is only a passing stage, the teacher to help Althea express "her instincts, the premises of her unconscious arguments," then his subjectivity has become part of hers. Althea (the female) becomes the perfecter of Baldwin (the male)--and thus reverses a central assumption of traditional aesthetics. Schiller, for instance, whose

works Lee knew well, constructs man as the perfecter of woman, of the beautiful soul who has no other virtue than being beautiful. According to post-Enlightenment aesthetics, the female can only have access to truth through intuition and sentiment without the will to recognition, which is imagined as a male quality. Female beauty (and truth) is a function of naivety; but naivety presupposes its opposite the *Sentimentalische* (art and culture). The child itself cannot be naive, for it is not aware of culture. It appears as man's simile and yet as different (in its naivety); the naive child thus is a projection of man, and the childlike man is the naive.¹¹⁹ The female is often associated with the child, and in her, as in the child, man recognizes simultaneously his "otherness" and his similarity. However, in Schillerian aesthetics, the image of the female is constantly threatened by its borderline existence to fall back into "rough" nature. Therefore, the male artist's *sentimentalische* operation has to transform the female image into his own as otherwise she would be an empty mirror in which he cannot recognize his image of her.

How does Lee transform Schiller's aesthetics for Althea? At first, Lee describes Althea in the same terms in which his German aesthetics conceived the female.

Althea is naturally the pupil of Baldwin; for, being all she is by the mere grace of God, she is, at first, inarticulate, unreasoning, ignorant of all why and

wherefore, and requires to be taught many things which other know . . . Her notions and decisions require to be disputed or explained only by natures more complex, more struggling, less fortunate than herself; to be tempered by characters better acquainted with weakness and sorrow, capable of bringing the element which is wanted to make love of truth and of justice efficient. . . . (Althea xvii)

However, Althea does not remain in the passive role of the female. She is not only positioned as the central character in the dialogues, but she also becomes the "perfecter" of most of Baldwin's best thoughts. She overcomes Baldwin, i.e. she transcends his education (culture), which Schiller's aesthetics puts as the superior principle. Althea does not need "man's" perfection, but she is her own autonomous principle. This transcendence is made possible through her lack of egocentrism, the quality which Lee saw as the main obstacle in man's striving for self-recognition. The male subject, Lee assumes, is only drawn deeper into its own miserable self and suffers *Weltschmerz*, whereas Althea's lack of egocentrism draws her outside herself. She never makes many claims for herself and is rather concerned with her "duties to others." Althea recognizes truth as soon as she sees it, not through learning but through intuition. However, she cannot serve as a model because she is from the beginning what others have to become through a long and painful process of learning. Lee excludes Althea from the cultural process of education to emphasize the discrepancy

between the ideal nature of Althea's subjectivity and the cultural means to achieve it.

From Lee's own directives in Baldwin and Althea, it becomes obvious that her concept of an alternative subjectivity implies consciousness of its own history. Lee's subjectivity is an evolutionary process with oscillating gender positions. Althea signifies female "nature," space, and performance, whereas Baldwin--although at a woman's standpoint--speaks in male language (culture, logos). I have used the term "evolution" deliberately as Lee applied Darwinian beliefs pervasively. Althea's "character" represents not an idealistic but an evolutionary subject, whose development not only contains the ontogenetic characteristics of her species (Baldwin), but who also adapts herself (through Baldwin's education) to herself and to her "environment." She is not compromised by the phallogocentrism of the symbolic system of Baldwin, but then we need to remember that Baldwin himself embodies this system only partially because of his double-gendered position.

Lee's construction of subjectivity in Althea bears a certain resemblance to recent feminist conceptions of female subjectivity. Eileen Schlee, for instance, although somewhat reductionist in her reading of Catherine Belsey, finds that

female subjectivity is not only multiple but also conscious of its own evolutionary process.

A state of naturally shifting subject-positions entails the self in a response mode of adaptation and change. The subject, in gaining competence with language, is then constantly constructing itself.¹²⁰

If neither Baldwin nor Althea is what s/he is and each a part of the other, the center of meaning is displaced and their dialogic relationship comes into the foreground. The question is not who Baldwin and Althea are, but how they are related, and how they modify each other. The relationship becomes a shifting subject position which is varied even further in each dialogue of the book through the inflection of other characters' voices.

In one of the Althea-dialogues ("Orpheus in Rome"), Lee gives a striking example of her non-essentialist conception of identity in an intense aesthetic experience. The discussion on aesthetic pleasure between the three characters--Baldwin, Donna Maria, and Carlo--is interrupted by the narrator's description of the performance, which invokes a sensuous, almost tangible image of sound and gesture whose total illusion is yet prevented by the visibility of the stage props ("cardboard clouds" and "make-believe ballet shepherds"). Similarly, when Orpheus appears, there is a moment of hesitation as his part is sung by a woman. His/her voice and costume, however, helped by the

spectator's imagination, transform the scene into a different reality, which is and at the same time represents the aesthetic impression.

But instead of the disturbing fact of a woman dressed up as a man, they [four notes] conveyed to the hearer, quite simply, naturally and irrefutably, the existence of a world of poetry and romance, and the presence of a demi-god. The slender creature, leaning against the side of the tomb, and arranging its garlands with listless fingers and eyes which looked not, was indeed a woman. One knew it in a second, but in a second also one had forgotten. (Althea 53)

The image of the actress playing the role of a man epitomizes several aspects of gender: the woman who plays the role of a man can "pass" for a man (a "demi-god"), if the viewer's willing suspension of disbelief accepts the role. For the aesthetic experience and therefore for the senses, reality can and has to be suspended. However, the narrator's assertion that "the disturbing fact" is forgotten does not quite hold true. The characters' discussion after the performance dwells to some extent on the "measured and harmonious and delicate" act of the female Orpheus, whose femaleness becomes even more of a presence through the mentioning of the singer's name, Helen Hastreiter. When the group attends the performance once more, no more mentioning of the actress is made. The text wraps the reader in the performance itself in which "among the ethereal music," Orpheus "as a strange and foreign thing," is impatiently searching for the restored Eurydice.

With that old smile, childish, half crazy, he laid his hand on her shoulder, the light of joy flooding his thin, irregular face and taking her by the hand, led her, his heart visibly panting with the sighing panting music, out of the crowd . . . Then, with infinite joyful gentleness, it descended, slowly, slowly, over her face, feeling for the well-known features . . . But at the second touch the joy in his face died out, smouldering gradually into doubt and disappointment . . . and, as the chorus drew to an end, there came up to him, suddenly from behind, and rapidly placing her hands on his shoulders the long-sought Eurydice. At that well-known touch, her lover gave a start, but not of joy: his slender figure shrank in her clasp, his face paled and shuddered, overcome by the greatness of happiness, by the sense of supernatural things. (Althea 89)

Lee's delicate sensuous description of the meeting between the two lovers can also be read as a lesbian subtext in a heterosexual guise. In this scene, sexual difference is simultaneously performed and transcended through a heightened aesthetic experience. We feel reminded of de Lauretis's description of lesbian representation as she puts it, "lesbian representation, or rather its condition of possibility, depends on . . . isolating but maintaining the two senses of homosexuality and homo-sexuality."¹²¹ By conflating the role of Orpheus with the performance of a woman, Lee also achieves a similar effect as, let's say, Monique Wittig in her split pronouns ("j/e") or her lesbian recastings of myths in The Lesbian Body.

Lee's strategy of gender masquerade in "Orpheus in Rome" appears as an attempt to create an image of female sexuality outside the heterosexual bind. Although the scene

is an "interruption" of the dialogues, its sensual intensity has a mesmerising effect on the reader so that the performance itself becomes the center of the text, marginalizing the "mere" logos. At the same time, the cultural frame of the dialogues is still Platonic and thus still grounded in sexual (in)difference, in de Lauertis's terms, "still caught in the tropism of hommo-sexuality."¹²² By positioning two perceptive modes *vis à vis*, Lee turns our attention to the devising of strategies of representation and exposes the conditions of what can be seen. In this respect it seems striking that Lee picked the Orpheus myth with the theme of seeing (or rather not seeing) as its central motif. To feel Eurydice and to be felt out by her replaces the perceptive mode of seeing and becomes the rewarding act, the remedy, the pharmacon. Lee's representation of the performance inverts contemporary cultural and ideological implications of vision: in the Orpheus scene, not-seeing is gain, seeing is loss. At the same time, this trope is acted out in a visible illusion. Although the audience's perception is undermined by "the disturbing fact" that Orpheus is played by a woman, the seeming incongruity is simultaneously overwritten by the sweeping effect of the music.

After those bars of introduction, of voyage, as it were, to the land of shades, there arose the reedy voice of a hautboy quavering in unearthly heights over

the tremulous violins . . . and soared into a stratum of sound where it trembles in isolation, panting and palpitating like the waves of heat in the summer air. (Althea 85-86)

Lee's evocation of sound through language becomes a palpable sensual experience, which has strong sexual undertones but is genderless and sexless, for it is conveyed through music, the least representational of all arts. Transcendence of gender occurs in the experience of a new reality created through the conflation of different aesthetic impressions made up of "old" realities. The aesthetic impression creates so to speak a heightened awareness of something beyond--"a borderland between fact and fancy" (Baldwin).

Lee's Orpheus scene makes an interesting reading against what Marilyn Frye calls "phallocratic reality." Frye assumes that our culture's conceptual reality (as a conventional stage play) foregrounds "phallocratic loyalists," whereas the stagehands who provide the necessary framework, remain in the background. Frye is interested in the reversal of these roles, when the stagehands (women) think of themselves as actors and thereby attract the attention of those in the audience who see what the conceptual system of heterosexuality tries to keep invisible. According to Frye, this reversal marks "the lesbian's seeing," which undercuts "the mechanisms by which

the production and constant reproduction of heterosexuality for women was to be rendered *automatic*.¹²³ In "Orpheus in Rome," the main roles are played by two women. The narrative of the opera provides gendered spaces which interact with the characters in such a way that heterosexual syntagm and same-sex paradigm do not conflict, but interact harmoniously and thus produce a new mode of sensation. The frame for spectatorial expectations is set by the (heterosexual) love story of Orpheus and Eurydice, but the aesthetic pleasure derives from the delicacy of the interplay between the women's voices and gestures. Lee's rendering of the scene suggests (in an un-Kantian way) that the "deception" is maintained through the aesthetic impression despite the better knowledge. The effect of Lee's description lies in its evocation of visible and invisible (conscious and unconscious) identities and thus suggests alternative visionary possibilities of gender.

Lee's visualization of what we may call a lesbian subtext, usually is less spectacular than in "Orpheus in Rome." In most other texts her evocative imagery and her heavily embedded syntax (with the parenthesis being one of her most typical devices) conceal subtexts which form a new logic if read with "other" primary signifiers. Similar to the texture of the sound of music in "Orpheus in Rome," which wraps itself around the visual scene and redresses

conventional perception, Lee "weaves" into her texts about the Renaissance (Euphorion) the image of history as a handed-down garment made to fit a different body. Through this running motif, we can read history from another (a woman's) point of view. Lee's "dress" is like the one often found in fairy-tales. It either gives a new vision to those who put it on or makes its wearer it invisible. In any case, the "masquerade" creates new imaginary spaces which are not totally fantastic but in a way still linked with the viewer's reality, i.e. with the cultural context of their origin.

In another recurring motif, namely that of the weather, the link to culture and cultivation is no longer maintained. In Althea (and Baldwin) Lee frequently uses weather as a dramatis persona which transcends the historic reality of her characters. Weather is not just a stage prop, a coulisse, but an agent which interacts with and, at times, even directs the characters. It is without a metaphysical core, uncentered, and ever changing. When conflicting positions become too complex clouds and sky interacting with sea or landscape begin to speak. Weather becomes the device that delays, displaces, but also concentrates meaning and yet it is not really part of the human order. Weather, in Lee's text, marks the space, the interval, in which the readers may construct momentary meaning, an aesthetic rest

from the freighted discussions of ideas. The spectacle of clouds, light, and landscape centers attention and yet decenters egocentric individuality, while the atmospheric appeal to the senses seems to create a space outside language.

In "On Friendship" (Althea), for instance, weather accentuates or delays the discussion. Althea is explaining her understanding of the difference between the love of God (which she calls "duty") and the love of human beings (what one enjoys) to Baldwin and Signora Elena, an elderly friend. Before Baldwin questions the notion of love altogether by calling it a delusion, the text steers away from the characters and creates an atmospheric pause.

The sun had set behind the big hill, with the great forge chimneys smoking like Baal altars into the grey clouds. The moon, wan and yellow, had appeared among the watery clouds; an emanation, it seemed, of those diaphanous olive groves, pale, vague, half luminous, whose solitary reign had begun, turning human beings into shy intruders in their breathless whispering grey silence. (Althea 115)

The scenery moves the speakers (and readers) onto a different level of speech and prepares the "frame" for Baldwin's monologue, which focuses on the ultimate isolation of individual life in which love is only an aesthetic construction, a "passing semblance" of the dream of absolute union. Momentarily, the descending evening, shrouds the characters in a delusive light. This image becomes the

palpable expression of Baldwin's abstract thoughts, while it also marks the point of the characters' discussion.

Everything had become utterly unsubstantial in the gloaming: houses mere pale, pink or yellowish-grey surfaces, people faint things, with outline dying away into the dark, creatures without solidity, which one might expect to walk through, moving freely in space. And with this dimness had come that strange appearance of aimlessness, of disconnection with all real concerns, of a crowd moving in the dusk. (Althea 117)

Lee also uses momentary atmospheric impressions to create an image of her main character Althea, who cannot be represented or described in other terms because she transcends the cultural order: "Sun and wind and sea, freshness and warmth and life, a permeating, overwhelming complexity of sensations and feelings, manifold, wonderful, indescribable" (120). Most evidently, Althea is connected with the movements of the sea in a kind of *unio mystica* which makes her different from other humans as Baldwin explains.

She may understand that--what the sea has to say, and why it is uneasy in mind . . . said Baldwin, nodding in the direction of Althea, "and I fancy she would be spoilt for one, that she would lose some of her odd charm if she could understand human seethings and moanings. . . ." (Althea 126)

Like the weather and the sea, Althea is characterized by an absence of self-centeredness, which seems to go along with the lack of clearly defined visual features of her gender. In comparison to Lee's design of her earlier self as Baldwin¹²⁴--"this not very feminine man to some measure at

a woman's standpoint"--, Althea is not a composition of male and female aspects. She does not really partake in the social order of gender but rather corresponds to the "natural" changing shapes of weather and landscape, which give her an original purity. Althea's "curious expression," and her "complete openness of mind," which reflect the image of the sea, by which her glance is absorbed, hints at possibilities of identification beyond the male-female bind.

The conversing characters are constantly moving about in the landscape shifting their figurative and their topographic positions. Landscape and sky open different vistas and the interplay of meteorology and geography, like the musical round of voices give us a sense of non-solid, shifting subject positions. On the other hand, the dialogues also have a definite historical reference. In Baldwin and Althea, Lee obviously rewrites the Platonic dialogues from a female point of view. If we read these two books in conjunction, the two title figures constitute what we may call a doubled (lesbian) subject, which implies and at the same time supersedes its own evolutionary process.

Lee's dialogues simultaneously invoke and undermine Plato's male-defined eros while they question nineteenth-century notions of male/female identity. She replaces Plato's male circle by men and women of her own time, which does not mean that they are "realistic" characters, but

rather abstracted types from her own cultural background. Baldwin and Althea are two historically different versions of Lee's identity as a "female philosopher."

Baldwin, as we have seen, is introduced in various relationships to Lee's writerly self. His narrative reflects her biography in terms of nationality, gender, education, and geography. His main characteristics is his indeterminate identity as a "not very feminine man to some measure at a woman's standpoint." Lee emphasizes that Baldwin overlaps but is not identical with her self. "Baldwin and I are distinct; he does not understand me quite; he stands outside me; he is not I . . . yet, I agree with Baldwin . . ." Most important, Baldwin is a construction beyond objectivity and subjectivity, a figure "on the borderland between fact and fancy."

In his role as Althea's teacher, Baldwin, then, represents male logos and the Academy of the Platonic model. From him Althea has learned to express her instincts and unconscious arguments. Her characteristic attributes--"inarticulate, unreasoning, ignorant"--mark her as the "formless" female stereotype of traditional philosophy, who cannot be creative out of her own power but has to be animated and perfected by man. At the same time, however, she appears as "one of those rare natures so strangely balanced that they recognize truth as soon as they see it."

Different from the conventional female image, Althea possesses genius through her own nature and looks to male language only as a communicative tool, not as a site of meaning. Once having learned the language, she becomes "the precursor of many of Baldwin's best thoughts, and perfecter of most of them." In Althea, Lee subverts the male-female hierarchy in philosophical discourse by making woman the origin and the end of her own genius and by reducing man's part to that of a necessary but disposable mediator.

Baldwin, as Lee reassures us, is an abstract being constructed for a universe without "rain, wind, or frost." He is replaced by Althea, who makes friends with the "waves, and winds, and clouds." By presenting Althea as a creature of "nature," Lee runs the risk of reinforcing the traditional etymological link between woman and nature and thus to return to the gendered subject-object dichotomy. However, she makes Althea's female identity less important by emphasizing her visual appearance as a boy. With her "boy's cap" and "her face rather of a beautiful boy than of a woman," she is unfeminine--yet not masculine--in her physical appearance. At the same time, she occupies a projected male space as she also appears as "one of the youths of Plato's dialogues." Through the trope of the adolescent boy, Lee can link Althea with nature without supporting the conventional female image. As a boy, Althea

is neither male nor female (as defined by the hetero-patriarchal system), but rather a state of becoming. Thus, she embodies a possibility of transcending the traditional gender categories even within the conventions of male discourses.

At the same time, Lee reverses Plato's master-pupil hierarchy by locating the disciple (Althea) in the center of the book. Althea replaces the master without reproducing the old structures of power inherent in the gender hierarchy she transcends. Lee reinforces this transformation through her rhetorical strategy. Like Socrates's eulogy on Eros (in Phaedrus) her central Althea dialogue "On Friendship" appears exactly in the middle of the book. Lee thus evokes the Platonic model without explicitly naming it. At the end of the dialogue, she gives the final speech to another female character, the wise Signora Elena. In complete understanding, Althea kisses the older woman's hand, a gesture which silences (male) logos and logic, but which "seemed more meaningful than words." Lee thus replaces male-defined homoerotic Platonism with one gesture; Althea's kiss seals the female-female bond outside the male symbolic system of language.

In Althea, Vernon Lee deploys a literary (male) model that is based on same-sex relationships to create a possible condition for the representation of lesbian subjectivity.

Lee does not simply replace Plato's male society by women but by figures which embody male and female parts of her own experience. Althea supersedes Baldwin's split identity of the past but, instead of "repressing" him, she keeps him separate in her consciousness as a personified stage of her own historical development. In this way, Lee overwrites the "old" universal subject (whose gender is male) and questions simultaneously the notion of subjectivity itself.

Althea's subjectivity, which becomes the center of meaning in the dialogues, seems to partake in all genders. But although her gender is indeterminate, her subject orientation is invested in a female relationship and, therefore, lesbian. We may say that Lee's implied configuration of an alternative (lesbian) subjectivity in Althea is built on the more open and versatile notion of "sexual orientation" rather than sexual identity. Similarly, Eve Sedgwick sees the interesting issue today for feminism and for gay and lesbian studies, not in gender, which is "publicly and unalterably assigned . . . from birth," but rather in "sexual orientation, with its far greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness."¹²⁵

Notes

1. Vernon Lee in a letter to her half brother Eugene Lee-Hamilton, August 31, 1893. Vernon Lee's Letters. Ed. Irene Cooper Willis, (London: Privately Printed, 1937), 364.

2. Henry James Letters, vol. III. ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 166-169.

3. Walter Pater's Letter to Violet Paget, June 4, 1884. Vernon Lee Collection, Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, ME.

4. The survey of Lee's literary publications is fairly complete now. The Vernon Lee Collection is in the Miller Library at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, where her literary executrix Irene Cooper Willis left it in 1951. The collection consists of Vernon Lee's texts, correspondence, journals and notebooks, drafts, manuscripts of unpublished works, part of her personal library, photographs, and other memorabilia.-- Phyllis F. Mannocchi's comprehensive list of Vernon Lee's works is invaluable for every scholar: "Vernon Lee: A Reintroduction and Primary Bibliography." English Literature in Transition, (1983), 231-267. Carl Markgraf's "'Vernon Lee': A Commentary and an Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Her," English Literature in Transition (1983): 268-312 compiles and summarizes the many scattered criticisms on Lee in English and other European languages, especially the contemporary reviews, which are difficult to locate today.

5. G.B. Shaw, "Satan the Waster," Nation XXVII (September 18, 1920), 758-760.

6. See, for instance, David Lodge, The Language of Fiction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel, 1865 - 1900 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965); John Halperin, The Theory of the Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Eric Warner and Graham Hough, eds., Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840 - 1910 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

7. "Her appearance at this time was somewhat unconventional, even a little odd, by contemporary Victorian standards . . . Among the English society in which she moved the difference in her upbringing and attitude was marked not only by the slightly foreign precision of her vocabulary and intonation but also by the frequent use of gesture, particularly

Italian in its graceful appropriateness or in its vehemence, when reinforcing a point." Peter Gunn, Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856-1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 90.

8. Harriet Waters Preston, "Vernon Lee." Atlantic Monthly, 55 (Feb 1885), 219-27. The Reviewer from the Spectator--obviously unfamiliar with her real identity--had praised "Mr. Lee" for "his curious and recondite learning." "Current Literature," Specator (26 June 1880), 821-22.

9. Lee was resolute when she tried to keep her works outside the marks of conventional genre patterns. Her play Ariadne in Mantua, for instance, "was intended for reading, not for the stage," as she explained in a letter (April 15, 1908) to Lillah McCarthy (Mrs. Granville Barker) who had asked Vernon Lee to make some changes so that it could be put on stage. Quoted in Alice Pattee Comparetti, "'A Most Exquisitely Beautiful Play' That Failed to Reach the Stage," Colby Library Quarterly 14 (May 1954): 221-226.

10. Burdett Gardner observes that Vernon Lee--like Pater--creates her fictional as well as her historical characters as "composites of the writer's own likeness" who "embody as much of their creator as they do of their historical originals." Burdett Gardner, The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style). A Psychological and Critical Study. (New York & London: Garland, 1987), 562.

11. Vineta Colby, The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century (New York: New York University Press, 1970).

12. Elaine Showalter, ed. Daughters of Decadence Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

13. On Euphorion, Walter Pater wrote to Vernon Lee in 1884: "Euphorion arrived last Saturday. It is a very great pleasure to me to find myself associated with literary work so delightful and so excellent as yours, and I thank you sincerely for your generous and graceful dedication to myself. . . Very remarkable learning: by which I mean far more than an extensive knowledge . . . very remarkable power of style--full of poetic charm, without which, certainly, no handling of such subjects as yours could be appropriate--imagination, justly expression, sustained and firm--as women's style so seldom is." Walter Pater's letters to Violet Paget, Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, ME.

--Réné Wellek (on The Handling of Words) speaks of "shrewd observations unusual for the time (the 1890's) in which they were written. A mind untrammelled by authority, often groping in expressing its meaning but always directly in contact with the phenomena before her. . . ." In "Vernon Lee, Bernard Berenson, and Aesthetics," in Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale, 1970) 164-186.

14. See Rachel Bowlby, Virginia Woolf: a Woman's Essays (London: Penguin, 1992), xxvii.

15. See, for instance, Burdett Gardner, The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of Vernon Lee, diss., Harvard University, 1954 (New York and London: 1987).

16. Eileen Schlee, "The Subject is Dead, Long Live the Female Subject!" Feminist Issues 13,2 (Fall 93): 71-80.

17. The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1923) 296.

18. Violet Paget, letter 350, to Matilda Paget, 3 August, 1887, and letter 561, July 25, 1891; Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, ME.

19. Vernon Lee's Letters to Eugene Lee-Hamilton (August 31, 1893), 364.

20. "She was very strong on grammar; acquired an exhaustive (and to my childish mind exhausting) knowledge of the fourteen cases (including avec le peu) of the French past participle. Also she had great faith in Euclid, of whom she had mastered up to and inclusive of the fifth proposition of the first book, besides the definitions and postulates, all of which she endeavoured to convey to me during our walks, always by word of mouth, and without allowing me to glance at a diagram or even to draw one furtively in the road's dust. . . ." The Handling of Words, 298.

21. Academy 18 Feb. 82: 112.

22. "Vernon Lee," Atlantic Monthly 55 (Feb 85): 219-27.

23. Athenaeum 5 July 1884: 7-8

24. "Vernon Lee's Euphorion," Saturday Review (London) 6 Sept 1884: 317-18.
25. See for example, "Our Library Table," Athenaeum 28 Nov 1908: 68 [on Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy]; "Euphorion," Pall Mall Gazette 7 July 1884: 4-5; "The Countess of Albany," Athenaeum 23 Aug 1884: 229-30.
26. "Rome and Venice," TLS 13 Oct 1905, 339.
27. "Rome in Spring," Academy (London) 69 (14 Oct 1905): 1073-74.
28. "Vernon Lee's Euphorion," Saturday Review (London) 6 Sept 1884, 317-18.
29. "Euphorion," Nation (New York), 40 (22 Jan 1885), 76-77.
30. "Books of the Week" Vernon Lee's Renaissance Essays," Times (London), 13 Dec 1895, p.13.
31. Walter Pater's letters to Vernon Lee, June 4, 1884.
32. Sydney Waterlow, "The Beautiful," International Journal of Ethics (Philadelphia) 24, July 1914: 459-63.
33. E. Purcell, "Euphorion," Academy 19 July 1884: 37-38.
34. Some examples of Hillebrand's corrections of Ottilie in a letter to Violet Paget, 16 July, 1883, may illustrate how a pedant would read her work. "Your hero was born in 1759 (the same year as Schiller) and was between 14 and 15 (p. 86) when he made the acquaintance of councillor Moritz. Yet (p. 102) you speak of the summer 1782 as the time of this intimacy, which would make your hero a youth of 23. By changing 1782 in 1773, all comes right, and the reading of Laocoon as a new book becomes more natural.[...] p. 81, I would say W. was about to write a refutation of the Dramaturgie (not Drammaturgie), not "had written", as the Dramaturgie was just written in this very year. I think it would be advisable to correct with a pen the two dates (p. 102 and 120) and the word Dramaturgie."
35. "Books. Euphorion," Spectator (London) 12 July 1884: 916-18, and "Recent Books on Italy," Atlantic 97 (April 1906): 559-60.
36. "Laurus Nobilis," TLS 5 Aug 1909: 284.

37. "On Modern Thought," Times (New York) 1 Aug 1886: 9. One review of Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy states that "it is an amazing production for a woman, and especially a young woman." Harriet Preston Waters, "VL", Atlantic Monthly 55 (Feb 1885): 219-227. The same critic writes about The Countess of Albany (1884), that "VL may be in the vanguard of women writers, who have 'power to touch pitch with no speck of defilement,' unlike the average male writer."

38. "The Artistic Dualism of the Renaissance" Contemporary Review (Sep 1879): 44-65 (republ. in Euphorion)

39. "Are Myths Necessary? Vernon Lee's Exposure of the Syndicalist Myth," Current Opinion 54 (April 1913): 313-14, on Vital Lies (1913).

40. Violet Paget, letter 67, to Mrs. Jenkins, 18 December, 1878, Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, ME.-- However, the rumor that Vernon Lee was a woman did not spread too quickly. On 26 June, 1880, the Spectator reviewer of Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy still speaks of "Mr. Lee" (p 821-22). It is strange that in 1882, Cosmo Monkhouse still speaks of Vernon Lee and "his readers" in his Academy article on Belcaro of 18 February, 1882: 112, since it was the Academy which found out Vernon Lee's identity.

41. J.A. Symonds, for instance, admired Vernon Lee's book on the eighteenth century and considered her knowledge in this field unrivalled by anybody else. For further details see Phyllis Grosskurth, The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of J.A. Symonds (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt & Rinehart & Winston, 1964) 222-256.

42. For instance, in Mike Ashley, Who's Who in Horror and Fantasy Fiction (New York: Taplinger, 1978); Lee's supernatural story "A Phantom Lover" (1886) is included in Five Victorian Ghost Stories, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1971) 299-340. The most recent re-editions of her Supernatural Tales date from 1987 and 1990: Vernon Lee, Supernatural Tales: Excursions into Fantasy with an introduction by Irene Cooper Willis. London: P. Owen, 1987. Vernon Lee, Amour Dure: Unheimliche Erzählungen, ed. mit einem Nachwort von Frank Rainer Scheck. (Köln: Du Mont, 1990).--Other republications of her fantastic tales are: "The Snake Lady" and Other Stories (New York: Grove Press, 1954); Pope Jacynth and Other Fantastic Tales (London: Peter Owen, 1956); Hauntings: Fantastic Stories (Freeport: Books

of Library Press, 1971); For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories (New York: Arno Press, 1976) Hauntings: Fantastic Stories. (London: Heinemann, 1978).

43. Some of the republished essay collections are: The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) [orig. 1923], (Magnolia: Peter Smith, 1968); Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972) [orig. 1886]; The Poet's Eye. Notes on Some Differences between Verse and Prose (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974) [orig. 1926]; Renaissance Fancies and Studies (New York: Garland, 1977) [orig. 1895]; The Beautiful. An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions 1970 & 1974; Norwood: Norwood Library Editions, 1977; Philadelphia: R. West, 1978) [orig. 1913]; Studies in the Eighteenth Century in Italy (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978) [orig. 1887].

44. "Sie ist aber nicht fähig gewesen, ein Anschauungsbild von der italienischen Renaissance zu geben, das neben den Darstellungen ihrer größeren Zeitgenossen zu bestehen vermöchte." Max Bräm, Die italienische Renaissance in dem englischen Geistesleben des 19. Jahrhunderts, im besonderen bei John Ruskin, John Addington Symonds und Vernon Lee (Zürich: Brugg, 1932) 98.

45. Elizabeth Libbey, "The Vernon Lee Papers," Colby Library Quarterly 8 (November 1952): 117-119.

46. Two years prior to writing his dissertation, Burdett Gardner published a short article "Who Was Vernon Lee?" Colby Library Quarterly 3 (November 1952): 120-122.

47. See Lillian Fadermann, rev. of The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of "Vernon Lee", by Burdett Gardner, Journal of Homosexuality 19 Nov 1990: 121-124.-- Lillian Fadermann lists up the extent of Gardner's scholarship: "He managed in the early 1950's to locate and interview 21 people in England, France, and Italy who met Vernon Lee before she died in 1935. He read thousands of letters by her and to her, and he read her 43 books." But she immediately qualifies the facts, and rightly so, by adding: "Unfortunately, he put all that material to the primary use of rehashing antipathetic lesbian stereotypes."

48. Gardner locates Lee's lesbianism in her nature whereas he describes the "symptoms" of her behavior in terms of the cultural decorum. We feel reminded of the early sexologists in Gardner's ludicrous physical "evidence" which is to show that her "Lesbian neurosis . . . was . . . to change her physique and her secondary sex characteristics (144)." In this way, his description parallels the characterizations of female "inversion" by the two leading sexologists in Lee's time, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. Both focussed on the social behavior and physical appearance (dressing) to establish a biological model. Krafft-Ebing, in particular, linked women's rejection of traditional gender roles and their demands for social and economic equality to cross-dressing, sexual perversion and hermaphroditism: "Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances . . ." Quoted in Carol Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: A. Knopf Inc., 1985) 271.

49. Peter Gunn, Vernon Lee: Violet Paget 1856 - 1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

50. Vineta Colby, "The Puritan Aesthete: Vernon Lee," in The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century (New York: New York University Press, 1970) 235-304.

51. Colby, 258-69.

52. Gunnar Schmidt, Die Literarisierung des Unbewußten: Studien zu den phantastischen Erzählungen von Oliver Onions und Vernon Lee (Frankfurt: Lang, 1984).

53. See for instance, Adeline R. Tintner, "Vernon Lee's 'Oke of Oakhurst' or 'The Phantom Lover' and James' 'The Way it came,'" Studies in Short Fiction 28 (3) (Summer 1991): 355-362. Peter Christensen, "The Burden of History in Vernon Lee's Ghost Story 'Amour Dure,'" Studies in the Humanities (June 1989): 33-43.

54. Victorian Studies 35 (4) (1992): 385-415.

55. Virginia Blain's review of Burdett Gardner's book in Victorian Studies 33 (2) (Winter 1990): 351-52.

56. Quoted in Burdett Gardner, 267.

57. Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?" Journal of the History of Sexuality 5 (1) (1994): 90-114; Terry Castle, The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 16.

58. "In a politico-poetic act, a lexical metamorphosis, Wittig has reintroduced the word *cyprine* with new usage. Just as the phallic subject, on the bodily level, produces semen, and on the symbolic level, seminaries and seminar and seminal words, the lesbian as sexual subject produces *cyprine* (Lesbian Body 139). . . ." Namascar Shaktini, "A Revolutionary Signifier: The Lesbian Body" in Joanna Glasgow and Karla Jay, Lesbian Texts and Contexts 291-303.

59. For instance, Lee's rewriting of "Abélard and Heloïse" in Renaissance Fancies and Studies points to Rousseau's and even Pater's one-sided "sacrifice" of the female in order to emphasize the innovative spirit of Abélard. Lee puts Abélard's teachings into a the context of a dehumanized Christian religion that crushes genuine love and human emotion, embodied by Heloïse.

60. See for instance, British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Continuum, 1989) 407-10; The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present ed. Virginia Blain, Patricia Clemens, Isobel Grundy (London: B.T. Batsford 1990).

61. Elsie B. Michie, "Violet Paget," An Encyclopedia of British Women Writers, eds. Paul Schlueter and June Schlueter, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988) 357-58.

62. Vineta Colby, "The Puritan Aesthete: Vernon Lee," The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the 19th Century (New York: New York University Press, 1970) 235-304. --To be sure, the terms "fiction" and "non-fiction" do not neatly map into the realms of novel and essay. In the history of both genres, there are enough examples in which the exclusionary opposition of such labels breaks down.

63. Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York & London: Routledge, 1989) 81-100.

64. in Gospels of Anarchy (London and Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908) 263-297.

65. Belcaro (1881).

66. Belcaro, 100-01.

67. Lee's misgivings about the notion of objectivity brings to mind Montaigne's skepticism about the stability of language and his distrust in "objective" judgment (if we consider Bakhtin's reading of Montaigne). In "A Dialogic Approach to the Essay," Thomas E. Recchio sees Montaigne's doubts reapplied in poststructuralist critics such as James Clifford's who exposes in the adequacy of the notion of objective observation in the human sciences. Almost echoing Lee's words, Recchio then concludes, "observation is intention, is interpretation, and as a result, the authority of the observer is limited even as the range of what can be observed is extended (284)." In Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre ed. Alexander J. Butrym (Athens and London: University Press of Georgia, 1989) 271-288.

68. Renaissance Fancies and Studies: Being a Sequel to Euphorion (1895) 239.

69. Euphorion, I: 11.

70. Renaissance Fancies and Studies 137.

71. Vernon Lee, Ottillie: An Eighteenth Century Idyl [sic] (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1883) 8.

72. Ottillie 10-11.

73. Renaissance Fancies and Studies (London: Smith, Elder, 1895) 163-231.

74. Ottillie 7.

75. Joel Haefner, "Unfathering the Essay: Resistance and Intergenreality in the Essay Genre," Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism 12.3 (1989): 258-73.

76. "An Introductory Essay," Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittman, ed. The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 13.

77. In her introduction to Virginia Woolf. A Woman's Essays (London: Penguin, 1992), Rachel Bowlby criticizes Woolf's omission of Eliot in an all-male genealogy as a strategical move so that she could "then give all the more force to

Woolf's own takeover of the genre for unfemininely feminist concern" (xxvii).

78. Leslie Stephen, "National Biography," in Studies of a Biographer (London: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1898) 27.

79. Symonds was irritated by Vernon Lee's self-assurance. She had obviously sensed his resentment and asked him for the background of his carping, a request which brought forth a diatribe. "I feel that you imagine yourself to be so clever that every thing you think is either right or else valuable. And your way of expressing yourself is so uncompromising that your belief in yourself grates upon my sense of what is just and dignified . . . I am the very last to conceive that any one should withhold his opinion from the world, or (what is in my eyes a sin) should make concession to age, established reputation, & the like. Yet there is a certain grave and measured way of expressing difference with accepted wisdom, a certain caution and reserve in asserting our own opinions, especially when these had not stood the test of a lifetime, and I have always been sorry to see you miss . . . I cannot help thinking you would be really greater and more effective, if you were (to use a vulgar phrase) less cocksure about a heap of things." J.A. Symonds "To Violet Paget," 4 April, 1884, letter 1382 of The Letters of J.A. Symonds, ed. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters vol. 3, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967-69).

80. see several discussions on the male/female styles of essays in The Politics of the Essay, as for instance Eileen Boyd Sivert, "Flora Tristran: The Joining of Essay, Journal, Autobiography," 57-72, and Katherine V. Snyder, "From Novel to Essay: Gender and Revision in Florence Nightingale's 'Cassandra,'" 24-40.

81. For an extensive discussions of women's role in the publishing process in Victorian England, see Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortis, Edging Woman Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

82. See Ruth Sherry, Studying Women's Writing: an Introduction (London: Edward Arnold, 1988) 21.

83. Edging Woman out 188.

84. Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittmann, "An Introductory Essay," The Politics of the Essay 16.

85. In "A Voice of One's Own," Tuzyline Jita Allen quotes from Woolf's A Writer's Diary on this point, where she speaks of Joyce's "damned egoistical self." The Politics of the Essay 143.
86. Virginia Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-Writing," Virginia Woolf: A Woman's Essays ed. Rachel Bowlby (London: Penguin, 1992) 7.
87. Virginia Woolf, "The Modern Essay," Virginia Woolf: A Woman's Essays 42.
88. Deborah Pope, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction: The Work of Feminist Criticism," 27. Women and a New Academy: Gender and Cultural Context. Ed. Jean F. O'Barr. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, 22-37. There are other feminist critics who criticize Woolf's self-concealing act, as for instance, Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), in the chapter "Virginia Woolf and a Flight into Androgyny," 263-97. Jane Marcus, "Art and Anger," Feminist Studies 4 (1978): 94, would have preferred a little more anger in Woolf's "polite" manner.
89. "Nietzsche and the Will to Power," Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies (London & Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908) 161-189.
90. Carol Smith-Rosenberg, "The Body Politic," in Elizabeth Weed, Coming to Terms 101-121.
91. The phrase is used by a contemporary critic in "Are Myths Necessary? Vernon Lee's Exposure of the Syndicalist Myth," Current Opinion 54 (April 1913): 313-14
92. Lisa Walker sees the role of the "femme" (as opposed to the identification model of the "butch") as an example for "passing," i.e. creating the illusion of an interior gendered self as she looks like a "straight" woman, while she simultaneously parodies herself, as "what you see is not what you get." "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are," Signs 18 (4) (Summer 1993): 866-890.
93. Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 59.

94. See, for instance, Ann Ardis, New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 51-52.--In this context it is interesting to note that when Henry James criticized Vernon Lee's unfortunate Miss Brown, one of his main arguments was that she had invested the aesthetic movement with too much sexual motivation. He found that sexuality played a very minor role in their motives.

95. "It thus appears that 'sexual difference' is the term of a conceptual paradox corresponding to what is in effect a real contradiction in women's lives: the term, at once, of a sexual difference (women are, or want, something different from men) and of a sexual indifference (women are, or want, the same as men). Ant it seems to me that the racist and class-biased practices legitimated in the notion of 'separate but equal' reveal a very similar paradox in the liberal ideology of pluralism, where social difference is also, at the same time, social indifference." Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," Theatre Journal 40 (May 1988): 155-177.

96. In this respect a parallel can be seen between Lee's and the New Women writers' treatment of sexuality. As Carol Smith-Rosenberg shows, "it seems a tribute to the power of desire that, in their letters and diaries, the New Women were able to express such highly sensual, indeed erotic, feelings for one another. The erotic did not simply lurk as the unconscious of their letters or their lives. Time and again, it burst through all restraints and boldly claimed the name desire. But, note carefully, not the name sex." "The Body Politic," Coming to Terms 109-110.

97. This is the basic argument in "A Dialogue of Poetic Morality," but Lee returns to this aspect throughout her literary criticism, as for instance, in the introduction to Althea. "Only . . . that while our fathers made themselves wretched about their unworthiness in the eyes of God, we latter-day religious folk suffered sincere misery for the opposite reason: the universe and its arrangements dissatisfied man...Hence, we naturally imagine that everything is made for us, and that everything not made for us (if so be that anything is) must be made in our image" (xii-xiii).

98. Gospels of Anarchy, 103-155.

99. Althea xiv.

100. Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism (London: Verso, 1986) 149-50.

101. "Feminist, Female, Feminine," The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989) 117-132.

102. See for instance, Marlis Gerhardt, Stimmen und Rhythmen. Weibliche Aesthetik und Avantgarde (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986) 40. Gerhardt maintains that a female consciousness writing from a subjectless position only seems to follow the postmodern male course in denying identity.

103. Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change 60.

104. "The Economic Parasitism of Women," Gospels of Anarchy (London and Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908) 263-297. The essay first appeared under the title "Economic Dependence of Women," North American 175 (July 1902): 71-90.

105. Women and Economics: A Study in Economic Relations Between Men and Women as a Factor of Social Evolution (Boston: Maynard & Company, 1898).

106. I find it strange that Lee's biographer Peter Gunn calls Lee a feminist, who "has continually before him [sic] the understanding and recognition of the existence of a distinctly feminine point of view" (9). In Lee's books and articles that appeared between 1880 and 1910, there is only the essay mentioned above and a short Newspaper article on the question why women should have a vote, in which she explicitly takes a stand as a feminist. Some of her fictional texts focus on female characters--e.g. Miss Brown (1884) or The Countess of Albany (1885)--but these do not necessarily make her a feminist. Even among her hundreds of letters, remarks that directly address the "woman question" cannot be found easily.

107. There is an interesting parallel between Lee's argument and Monique Wittig's "On the Social Contract," Female Issues 9 (1) (Spring 1989): 5-12, in which Wittig links the establishment of the heterosexual social contract in language to the economic system by drawing on Levi-Strauss's thesis of the exchange of women.

108. Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine," 117-132.

109.Colby, 248.

110.Quoted from an interview by Burdett Gardener for The Lesbian Imagination, 60.

111.Ann L. Ardis, New Women, New Novels, Feminism and Early Modernism. In Ardis's otherwise thorough study Vernon Lee's name does not even come up in connection with Eliza Lynton and Mrs. Humphry Ward (outspoken critics of the New Woman), who were both friends of Vernon Lee's.

112.Gunn, 9.

113.See Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy," 107.

114.Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves (New York: Columbia, 1989) 289-90.

115. We find an earlier version of such self-positioning in the preface to Belcaro (1881) in which Lee explains her use of "we" as herself as writer and her addressee, meaning her reader. As she wants to make sure that the reader does not misunderstand her use of "we" as the same authoritative "we" of scholarly essays, she explains that she includes a "you" in her first-person-plural pronoun to stress the communicative aspect of her text. Writing for Lee is not making speeches, but another form of conversation which includes addresser and addressee with seemingly equal rights. Thus she tries to distinguish her voice from the didacticism of many traditional essayists.

I have always felt that someone else was by my side to whom I was showing, explaining, answering; hence the use of the second person plural, of which I have vainly tried to be rid: it is not the oracular we of the printed book, it is the we of myself and those with whom, for whom I am speaking; it is the constantly felt dualism of myself and my companion. (Belcaro 8)

116.For a similar (recent) definition of subjectivity see Eileen Schlee, "The Subject is Dead, Long Live the Female Subject," Feminist Issues (Fall 1993): 69-80.

117.Althea: Dialogues on Aspirations and Duties (London: Osgood McIlvaine, 1894) xvii.

118.I do not quite agree with Peter Gunn here, who sees Althea modelled on the unsophisticated spontaneous character of Lee's partner and friend "Kit" Anstruther-Thomson as a *mise en scène* for Lee's own sophistication and therefore as

a paternalistic gestures. Although Althea does indeed bear features of Kit (e.g. her tall and erect figure), we still need to read her character on the textual level. It seems that Gunn assumes too readily a direct representation of biography in the text, an assumption which may lead to oversimplifications.

119.Silvia Bovenschen, Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979) 52-56.

120.Eileen Schlee, 73.--The historicity of the subject is also emphasized by Linda Alcoff "Thus, through a conception of human subjectivity as an emergent property of a historicized experience, we can say 'feminine subjectivity is construed here and now in such and such a way without ever entailing a universable maxim about the 'feminine.'" Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Signs: Journal of Women, Culture and Society 13 (3) (Spring 1988): 431.

121.Teresa De Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," Theatre Journal 40 (May 1988): 155-177.

122.De Lauretis, 171.

123."To Be and Be seen," in Marilyn Frye, The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory (Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1983) 166-173.

124.Baldwin appears again as "her dead self" in Althea. This diachronic and yet synchronic doubling of "self" complicates Lee's representation of identity and shows her subjectivity as a process in time and space rather than an essence.

125.Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Across Gender, across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others," Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture, ed. Ronald R. Butters, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) 56.

CHAPTER 2
THE FEMALE VOICE OF HISTORY

Renaissance "Dress" and Female Subject

What bothered Vernon Lee about contemporary historiography was that the past was often treated as "a thing so utterly dead as to be fit only for the scalpel and the microscope" (Euphorion I: 12).¹ To her it seemed that the "European Barbarians," who ransacked Italian Renaissance culture in the sixteenth century, were about to pillage it again. Only this time the threat came from "this very modern scientific vandalism" of historical pedants like Grimm or Mommsen, who dissected history and filed it under encyclopaedic and abstract categories; or worse, it came from the "laborious bookworms"² who assembled from history only antiquarian detail. Likewise, she was skeptical of historical perspectives which narrowed down civilizations of previous centuries to what "germs" they contained for certain developments in the nineteenth--either as "puritan contemnners" or "decadent defilers," who both seemed to study periods like the Renaissance out of what she calls "inverted attraction." She did not spare "impressionistic" historians, such as Walter Pater, whose "search for variety and

poignancy" (instead of "efficiency of living") left in the reader "a sense of caducity and barrenness."³ In general, Lee was skeptical of all those men who tried to construe history for self-centered or egoistic purposes hidden behind a "disinterested" language.

In the 1880's, she was writing zealously on what she considered the right or wrong uses of history. We feel reminded of Michelet's impassioned rhetoric, when, for instance, in Euphorion (1884) she denounces historiographers for "murdering" the Italian Renaissance, which was "cut off pitilessly at its prime; denied even an hour to repent and amend; hurried off before the tribunal of posterity."⁴ In these early days when she still considered herself as historian and philosopher, her texts also show her concern to come to terms with the "apparent anomaly" of the Renaissance, i.e. the incongruity between advanced art and civilization on the one hand and moral corruption on the other, "the picture of a people moving on towards civilization and towards chaos" (EU, 1: 29).

She tries to find an approach to an epoch, to which she appears to be drawn because of her (as she calls it) "inverted attraction," the force which led many others, too, to write with open indignation and hidden lust about the crime and immorality in the Renaissance. In Euphorion she

holds the Elizabethan Dramatists, such as Webster or Ford, largely responsible for such a distorted picture as she discovers behind their mask of horror an almost morbid voyeurism of the gigantic villains and atrocious evils their text describe. Similarly, Lee refutes Ruskin's negative judgment of the Renaissance on moral grounds, as she sees in his verdict a repetition of the limited view of previous periods. Moreover, moral "degeneration" to her is an inappropriate category for history, which she construes in terms of a Darwinian evolutionary organism.

In any case, we have to consider that Lee enters a highly polemicized debate, which may help us understand her construction of a "counter image" of the moral ignorance and indifference of the Renaissance men and women to the moral standards as they were known to her contemporaries. Lee argues that "the moral atmosphere of those days is as impossible for us to breathe as would be the physical atmosphere of the moon: could we, for a moment, penetrate into it, we should die of asphyxia" (EU, 1: 22)." This image needs to be read as a rhetorical position which she constructs for her mainly aesthetic argument. We may wonder why in 1884 she was still charging at Ruskinian windmills, for she had already well established her anti-moralist stance in earlier texts, such as Belcaro (1881). On the

other hand, Pater's Renaissance had come under such critical fire (although mainly because of the "Conclusion") that she may have felt compelled to substantiate her view. Most of her contemporaries did not find fault with her amoral approach, but her rhetorical intent was clearly misunderstood by a polemical Wyndham Lewis, almost fifty years later, when he attacks her *ad hominem* in "A Lady's Response to Machiavelli" in The Lion and the Fox

We are provided in the work of a lady (the Euphorion of Vernon Lee) with the best indication, perhaps, of the attitude of the anglo-italian resident of the more correct type to the lingering renaissance they have settled amongst. To read her pages is like watching a person of some intelligence administering electric shocks to herself.⁵

The abusive tone of this first paragraph colors Lewis's whole article, which is a diatribe against the trifling of the Renaissance evils and has to be read in the context of Lewis's general condemnation of fin-de-siècle aestheticism as "incurably gothic, diabolic and medieval."⁶ Although we cannot accept Lewis's unfair and personal criticism, Lee's refutation of the Elizabethan Dramatists sounds at times a little overdrawn. Her texts bear the emotional coloring of some of Michelet's histories or rather of what Virginia Woolf would call the angry female voice.

The Italy of the Renaissance was, of all things that have ever existed or ever could exist the most utterly unlike the nightmare visions of men such as Webster and Ford, Marston and Tourneur . . . These frightful Brachianos and Annabellas and Ferdinands and Corombonas

and Vindicis and Pieros of the "White Devil," or of the Duchess of Malfy," of the "Revenger's Tragedy," and of "Antonio and Mellida," are mere fantastic horrors, as false as the Counts of Udolpho, the Spalatro, the Zastrozzi, and all their grotesquely ghastly pseudo-Italian brethren of eighty years ago. (EU I: 80-81)

On the other hand, Lee foregrounded an important aspect of the limitations of historiography, namely its inability to present an epoch as "it really" was because historical images are always already determined by previous representations. To her the Italian Renaissance was twice condemned by later literary movements; first by Elizabethan Drama and then again by "the grim and ghastly romances of the school of Ann Radcliffe (79)."

Ten years later, in Renaissance Fancies and Studies (1895), Lee speaks from a more detached position. Her second book on the Renaissance no longer focuses on its "strange truths" but rather presents a selection of pleasurable aspects from the viewpoint of the leisurely traveller. She obviously anticipated a certain resistance in her audience for this new stance, as the dialogue with herself reveals. "What! become absentees from the poor, much troubled Present; turn your backs to Realities, become idle strollers in the Past; And why not, dear friends? why not recognize the need for a holiday?"⁷ On the whole, however, she speaks with a new kind of self-confidence. Her former ardor seems to have given way to a more detached and at times even

ironic tone behind which the author is less conspicuous. She is well aware of her change as she professes in the "Valedictory" of Renaissance Fancies and Studies that "the knowledge has grown on me that I was saying farewell to some of the ambitions and to most of the plans of my youth (235)." Does the almost resigned tone indicate that her "angry female" voice has succumbed to the "objective" male discourses of historiography? Or can we consider her texts as manifestations of a new identity, in other words, an expression of her self-conscious assertion as a different, i.e. a female historian?

To find out what development has brought about this change of voice in Vernon Lee's historical writing, we have to explore the character of her early concepts and discursive strategies. We have to inquire, how her writing interacted with a discipline that was shaped by discourses reflecting male experiences, which were considered as universal and therefore genderless. How, then, does Lee inscribe her female experience in contemporary historiography whose language excluded a female subject?

Lee dismissed the "Hegelian verbiage"--i.e. the teleological concepts of most nineteenth-century scholars--from the early eighties on, after her publication of Belcaro. She compares historical periods with living organisms which die out of their own organic decay.

Therefore, she regards historical writing as a paradox, because it speaks of human development as progression, whereas the *telos* of all life is death. She denies the existence of universal truths or rational "meanings" in history itself and rather emphasizes the incidental. In Baldwin, for instance, she presents her own history as an "accident of education" as well as an "accident of family circumstances."⁸ Later she declares the contrary movements of the Italian Renaissance as a result of "coincidence" and decidedly not of "cause and effect."⁹

Lee was an admirer of Pater's aesthetic approach to history, and her emphasis on individual experiences and impressions rather than "facts," drew her much closer to him than to the "objective" discourses of traditional historiography, whose language suggested realities with which she could not identify. Pater's revisionary view of figures like Plato as well as his skepticism about logocentric interpretations of language and tradition offered a more viable path for her as he seemed to open possibilities for alternative forms of discourse expressive of newly emerging social and political communities which challenged hegemonic male traditions. Although we may agree with Richard Dellamora, that Pater's revalorization of desire could "create conditions in which groups--of women, of homosexuals, of industrial and agricultural workers, of

colonial others--"10 might devise new discursive possibilities, we need to be aware of the limitations of Paterian language as an expression of female experiences, for it still formed itself around the male subject. Pater's aesthetic innovations are in the first place challenges to literary male traditions. He was inscribing difference into a system whose primary signifiers were already phallic and therefore precluded woman's role in the process of cultural formation. When Lee appropriated Pater's text, she had to find a strategy to position herself differently as a subject so that she did not write herself out of history as an object.

Pater's representation of masculine difference produced a kind of self-division of the male subject, however, within patriarchal sexual relations which imply the subordination of women to men. He challenges a particular form of masculinity and not the male role in itself. Although his dynamic conception of masculinity could spin off reconsiderations of other social hierarchies, such as the structure of male-female relations, there is a crucial difference between Pater's masculine difference and male-female opposition. In Dellamora's terms, "male homosexuals at times occupy the hegemonic male position with regard to women, children, some other males [as, for instance, working-class men]."11 In nineteenth-century British

culture, women could not occupy the same space, and therefore any equation of homosexual with female subordination has to be treated with great skepticism.

The underlying gendered dichotomies in culture were also most effective in the privileging of certain genres or modes of representation over others. Realism and fact thus had a higher value than impressionism, fantasy, and fiction. Writers of history who assembled aesthetic impressions and not "facts," like Walter Pater, deliberately cut across these lines. "To know one's impression as it really is," as Pater bids in his Introduction to The Renaissance, described a new a kind of impressionistic "realism," which operated between different modes. Pater's new "realism" which describes the relationship between language and (in the widest sense) erotic desire, has its focus on the signifier. In other words, his texts unsettle meanings in the signifying system by overriding the traditional epistemological processes and thus become a challenge for the controlling powers of knowledge. His crucial position at Oxford--partly a representative of an elite male institution and partly subordinated by it--made him extremely aware of his antagonistic inscription of masculine difference against prevailing moral and political authorities. However, it has to be kept in mind that the challenge of his "aesthetic" historiography was directed at hegemonic discourses of

realism within a social male elite and therefore, somewhat limited.

To express masculine difference, Pater and his followers used literary languages associated with the feminine, i.e. such that accentuated sensitive and impressionistic styles. In other words, aestheticism masqueraded itself as feminine without granting actual women a role in the agenda. Thus a female writer like Vernon Lee, who was writing on both historical and aesthetic issues, could identify with the language of aestheticism only to a certain extent, if she did not want to run the risk of marginalizing herself within a male agenda. She used the Paterian polemical project to decentralize traditional male subjectivity; nevertheless, she invested her discourse with a female subject to have an effect on the still inherent gender hierarchy.

On the other hand, a female historian had to establish her basic expertise in historical scholarship, before she would be heard at all. This expertise automatically excluded the female viewpoint, the female subject, the female experience. If Lee chose to write from within an aesthetic discourse, she ran the risk of being twice marginalized: as a woman and as an oppositional writer. Thus, she had to adopt a language which expressed her experiences in others' terms, but which still allowed her to speak from a different

place. In other words, she writes from a highly self-conscious position which is at once complicitous with and antagonistic to contemporary literary formations.

Lee's struggle for a female viewpoint took place in a male discourse, which she had to wear so-to-speak like a borrowed garment that could make herself visible. This garment had to come off piece by piece so that she could adjust her readers' view to the different subject underneath which slowly became noticeable in spite of its invisibility. My investigation will focus on this transforming process in Lee's historical texts from the 1880's to the 1890's, to find out how a female historian could inscribe her own view and agency in the discourses of cultural formation.

Historic Intertextuality: Lee and Pater

We find one of the most striking examples of Lee's development towards a female subject in her final piece of Renaissance Fancies and Studies, called "A Seeker of Pagan Perfection: Being the Life of Domenico Neroni, Pictor Sacrilegus," which she introduces as

a certain story [which] has long lurked in the corners of my mind. Twenty years have passed since first I was aware of its presence, and it has undergone many changes. It is presumably a piece of my inventing, for I have neither read it nor heard it related. But by this time it has acquired a certain traditional veracity in my eyes, and I give to the reader rather as historical fact than as fiction the study which I

have always called to myself: *Pictor Sacrilegus*.
(RFSt 166)

This statement contains two chief aspects which lead us directly into Lee's struggle to carve out a space for her female position. First, by her deliberate orchestration of fact and fiction, she declares herself as the site where meaning is produced, that is, she no longer accepts the prevailing modes of representation as the "law" to which she subjects herself. To use a cliché from another masculine context, we may say that she took the law in her own hands, by declaring herself to be the historical text (texture) as well as its commentator. Lee devises a pattern in which her persona is the point of reference, the primary signifier, from which her text derives method and meaning.

Whereas in Euphorion she took great pains to justify her style within the polarization of fact and fiction, she now dismisses such differences as irrelevant. In other words, she displaces difference defined in binary opposites as a primary way to establish meaning and thus unsettles the authority of the current signifying system. It is important to note that Lee is not simply blurring or reversing binary oppositions but that she displaces them, very much aware of their existence. Thus she avoids relinquishing the chance for female agency by reinforcing a code that conceals its inbuilt hierarchisation of gender and genre. At the same

time, Lee alludes to the imaginary effects of language in which certain modes masquerade as real.¹²

The second important factor in Lee's self-fashioning as female historian involves a reevaluation of her relationship to Walter Pater. Lee's emphasis on the imaginary character of the story in "A Seeker of Pagan Perfection," emulates Pater's narrator in "Denys L'Auxerrois," who asserts "the story shaped itself at last" based only on "a fancy in my mind."¹³ The indirect reference to Pater is not a coincidence, for the plot of Lee's tale strikingly resembles narrative structure and content of "Denys L'Auxerrois," while it mimics Pater's portraits of artists in The Renaissance. We may read Lee's citational practice here as a kind of doubling, to open up a space for alterity, which allows her own reading of the implied ideological assumptions in Pater's text and at the same time alerts her to her ideological moves. This strategy is more obviously feminist in her short story "Dionea" (1886), which replaces Pater's pagan gods with a female deity. "Dionea" reads almost like a female version of "Denys l'Auxerrois," especially through her allusions to nineteenth-century aestheticism and Schopenhauerian misogyny. In this story she renegotiates a Paterian narrative in terms of a female subject while she deconstructs the underlying sexual anxieties of the male narrator and his community.

Both Lee and Pater believed in an evolutionary scheme that shows the transmission of pagan elements under the surface of "Christian" art. Obviously influenced by the literary anthropology of Andrew Lang, Pater organized the pagan in terms of a sequence of survivals and returns, which resembles Lee's own representation of a "pagan tradition." However, it seems that her almost ironic tone, particularly in "Dionea" and almost thirty years later in "The Gods and Ritter Tanhüser" (1913) is more indebted to Heinrich Heine's "Die Götter im Exil," which Pater also consulted.

Lee's intertextual relationship with Pater can be traced through her Renaissance essays and stories, which reveal the stages of her growing self-awareness of her different historical identity. After initially defining her historical approach through him, she later extricated herself from him quietly without denying his influence. In her "Valedictory" to Renaissance Fancies and Studies, she judges Pater's accomplishment by her own standard, disparaging the early Pater as "an aesthete of the school of Swinburne's *Essays*, and of the type still common on the Continent" (256), and praising his more "spiritual" perception of beauty in Marius.

In 1884, Vernon Lee dedicated her first Renaissance book to Walter Pater, but her previous works, Studies of the 18th Century in Italy and Belcaro were already written under

the impression of his ideas. While Pater played a decisive role in her historial approach, her texts also reflect her reading of the most influential nineteenth-century models of the Renaissance. Between Michelet, Ruskin, Burckhardt, and Symonds she carved out a path for herself as a biographer of the Renaissance to which she felt entitled because of her upbringing in the midst of its Italian relics. The Renaissance, then, became a paradigm for her concept of historiography and, even more so, for her self-fashioning as a female historian, and thus an "anomaly" (or a Paterian "new light" ?) herself. Nineteenth-century historicists often employed the idea of the Renaissance as a projecting ground for "a new period in life" or for the origins of "modern man;"¹⁴ but for Lee it was more than that. It was the place from where she could respond to cultural processes from "within" because she saw herself organically linked with Italian history through her growing up among its ruins and therefore believed herself to be free from the gendered restraints which contemporary discourses imposed on her.¹⁵

Lee's response to other historical or aesthetic viewpoints, then, reflects her attempt to intervene into the current discussions, from somewhere else. She has to carve out a subject position for a female historian within and without the discursive conventions, which keep women out of sight/site. Thus, she borrows the language from her male

colleagues, but she comes out from under that masquerade, in proportion to her growing consciousness of the ideological operations in historiography. She addresses the changeability of meanings throughout history, for instance, in her introduction to Euphorion and thus draws attention to the cultural determination of the discourses, to which she also contributes. By pointing to alternative perspectives--facilitated by her conception of history as a landscape--she denies the possibility for ultimate truth in history. Lee does not deny the relevance of historical inquiry, but she criticizes attempts to monopolize the field as a site of meaning by privileged social groups, and uses Pater's approach to foreground this aspect of relativity.

By selecting her historical subjects through the instrument of aesthetic impression she moves between and beneath solidified areas of knowledge to open up new areas of research. Through a change of perspective on the historical landscape--to use her own image--she finds that "according as you stand, the features of the scene will group themselves--this ridge will disappear behind that, this valley will open out before you, that other will be closed" (EU I: 10). Looking at a scene in perspective--not accidentally one of the main artistic achievements of the Renaissance--implies that every standpoint reveals slightly different views and that none of these can be absolute. Lee

modifies the one-point perspective by a temporal aspect, which implies that a scene produces "one or two predominant effects" and that we "see only very little at a time" (EU, I: 10-12). Therefore, she denies that history can convey universal or essential knowledge. History is "like an extended landscape," which we cannot really enter; all we can do is describe our impressions, "from different points of view, and under different lights . . . all the rest is the result of cunning abstraction. . . ." (EU I: 10). Thus Vernon Lee questions historicism, particularly its claim to reconstruct a historical setting as "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist" in abstract and universal language.¹⁶

Yet it is nevertheless certain that the past, to the people who were in it, was not a miraculous map or other marvellous diagram constructed on the principle of getting at the actual qualities of things by analysis; that it must have been, to its inhabitants, but a series of constantly varied perspectives and constantly varied schemes of colour, according to the position of each individual, and the light in which that individual viewed it. (EU I: 11)

Lee locates the realization of history in the persona of the writer who in this way becomes the site where the merging of past and present occurs. She acknowledges, however, that there are "blind spots," as we

"see only very little at a time, and that little is not what it appeared to the men of the past, if not the same thing, yet in the same manner in which they saw, as we see from the standpoints of personal interest and in the light of personal temper. (EU I: 12)

What is concealed from the historian's conscious inquiry she calls elsewhere "unconscious analogies,"¹⁷ implying

historically determined habits of perception, which partake in the constitution of the historical text. "Is not what we think of as the Past--what we discuss, describe, and so often passionately love--a mere creation of our own?"¹⁸

By acknowledging the relativity of perspectives in historiography and shifting the focus from the subject matter to the subject, Lee invests historical writing with a certain arbitrariness. As perspective has absolute value only within its own limitations, she can move about freely, choosing and aligning herself with points of view in history, which correspond to her own experience. For instance, she often associates her standpoint with that of neglected or disadvantaged groups, such as peasants or popular poets. We might think that such "downward" orientation would reinforce the weakness of the middle-class female position. However, by becoming an advocate for the the poor, she not only places herself "above," and therefore superior to them, but she also aligns herself with the topical discourses of political reform movements, such as the Fabians, that were gaining importance around that time. (Lee attended several socialist meetings between 1884 and 1886, when she stayed with Emily Ford's family in Leeds.¹⁹) On the other hand, she intertwines her argument with validated historical positions, such as Michelet's,²⁰ Villari's or Burckhardt's, and at the same time distances

herself from them. Like Burckhardt, for instance, she foregrounds the emergence of the strong and independent individual in the Italian cities of the Renaissance. But she disagrees with his adulation of the despotic states as the most eminent representatives of this development. On the contrary, she celebrates the communal spirit of the free republics as the source for individual strength and liberty, which was crushed by feudalism. In the end, she aligns herself with Burckhardt again, as, like him, she sees the feudal structures as an impediment to the individual's development.

Let us remember that the communal system of government, on whose development the Renaissance mainly depended, inevitably perished in proportion as it developed; that the absolute sujugation of Italy by Barbarous nations was requisite to the dissemination of the civilization thus obtained; that the Italians were politically annihilated before they had time to recover a normal condition, and were given up crushed and brokenspirited, to be taught righteousness by Spaniards and Jesuits. (EU 1: 53)

It seems that Lee aligns her historical perspective with that of Pater's "impressionistic" historian, who "amid the multitude of facts presented to him must needs select, and in selecting assert something that comes not of the world without but a vision within." And indeed, "the vision within" shapes all of Pater's Renaissance and thus dismisses the traditional apparatus of historical reference. He sees his first duty not in representing history as a sequence of

exterior events, but--possibly following Swinburne's intent in "Notes on Designs of Old Master at Florence"--to find a "legible form" for his "impressions."²¹ And therefore, "Gibbon . . . Livy, Tacitus, Michelet . . ." [and we may add, Vernon Lee] "each, after his own sense, modifies--who can tell where and to what degree? and becomes something else than a transcriber . . . he becomes an artist, his work *fine art*."²²

By combining signifiers into an artistic composition, Pater creates a meta-text, i.e. a text that arises between the artwork and its verbal representation. The role of the paintings in his description is twofold, as J.B. Bullen has shown. They "act as the paradigmatic modes of perception of the subjects of the essay" and, on a second level, they are also "the expression of Pater's own consciousness."²³ We may even add a third, transcending function of artworks in Pater, which is that they become the text in an almost religious act of transubstantiation, which brings Pater's work closely to what was to be known as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He describes his aesthetic process in "Winckelmann," which can be read as the structuring device or master text from which he spins off the individual artistic portraits. Although I would agree with J.B. Bullen that the shift of style from "Winckelmann" to "Leonardo da Vinci," especially in "La Gioconda," can be seen as a shift from an allegiance to the

methods of Ruskin to those of Swinburne, I would question that in "La Gioconda" the physical properties of the work of art "fade from view" and that the signifier takes precedence so that the painting becomes insignificant.²⁴ It rather seems that the symbiosis between sign and signified, object and subject, could come about only because he could rely on his educated audience's visual familiarity with the pictures he uses or at least on the circulation of other descriptive texts, such as those by Ruskin, Swinburne, Burckhardt, or Herder, which were well known to the cultural elites of nineteenth-century Britain.

In a way, Pater's use of artworks resembles what Riffaterre calls the "paragram" (based on Saussure) in Symbolist poetry. Like paragrams, the pictures form a subcode, which makes it possible for the text to control its own decoding. "What happens," Riffaterre asks, "when a literary tradition is forgotten and cultural changes wash away the paragram?" And for Pater's model, we may ask, what happens if the reader is not familiar with his pictures? Again, Riffaterre's explanation seems to be plausible for both French Symbolist and Paterian texts.

The text is the starting point of the reader's reactions, not its paragrams. Obviously the reader who shares the author's culture will have a richer intertext. But he [sic!] will be able to draw on that wealth only when semantic anomalies in the text's linearity force him to look to nonlinearity for a solution. And the reader who is denied access to the

intertextual paragram still sees the distortion, the imprint left upon the verbal sequence by the absent hypogrammatic referent.²⁵

Applied to Pater this may mean that the readers' degree of familiarity with the artworks in question determines the degree of immersion into the text. Pater's "nonlinearity" does indeed create a certain coercion for the audiences to read his texts (if we were to use his own words in Greek Studies) as "sacred representations or interpretation of the whole human experience, modified by the special limitations, the special privileges of insight or suggestion, incident to their peculiar mode of existence."²⁶ Pater thus creates a bond between himself and those readers from the same cultural elite. On a more critical note, we may quote Vernon Lee, who describes Pater's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as "some perfect tissue of silver flowers on silver grounds."²⁷

Vernon Lee generally shares Pater's subjective approach to history, and instances of criticism are rare even in a more covert form than her open "attack" in "The Outdoor Poetry," which refers to his too "dainty" representation of the thirteenth-century French tale "Aucassin and Nicolette."²⁸

I can recall one, though only one occasion in which medieval literature shows us the serf. The place is surely the most unexpected, the charming thirteenth century tale of "Aucassin and Nicolette." In his beautiful essay upon that story, Mr. Pater has deliberately omitted this episode, which is indeed like a spot of blood-stained mud upon some perfect

tissue of silver flowers on silver ground . . . and in the midst of this idyl [sic] of lovely things; in the midst of all these delicate patternings, whose minuteness and faint tint merge into vague pleasurable impression; stands out . . . the episode which I am going to translate. (EU I: 133-34)

Nowhere else in her writing do we find such a piece of criticism of her "mentor," which becomes especially salient through the qualifier "deliberately" that implies a willful and artificial act. What makes Pater's omission even more serious is that this medieval piece of social criticism seems to be unique in its kind. Vernon Lee, then, sounds almost triumphant, when she ends her passage with "which I am going to translate."

The little episode in which a poor serf looking for his cow meets Aucassin gets more weight through the context of Lee's essay. Earlier, she criticizes medieval courtly literature for aestheticizing the image of the hard-working, poor peasants and thus for appropriating so-to-speak "the classes for whom poetry was not written" for selfish purposes. This appropriation left the "real" lower classes with the residue, i.e. "the brutishness, the cunning, the cruelty, the hideousness, the heresy of the serf, whose name becomes synonymous with every baseness" (EU I: 131). In this context, we are almost led to believe that Lee sees Pater's "idyl of lovely things" as helping to perpetuate this unrealistic class-blind image of the aristocracy.

In this part of Lee's essay we find an interesting footnote--one of only two footnotes in the whole 450-page work--in which she explicitly links class and gender oppression in a striking example. She juxtaposes the denigration of the historical serf by medieval French and German poets with the Provençal Pastourala which "represents the courting, by the poet, who is, of course a knight, of a beautiful country-girl, who is shown us as feeding her sheep or spinning with her distaff" (131n). Lee attacks the "Dresden china" pattern of these poems, considering them as unrealistic as the "pastorals" of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. She shows that the poetic representation of the offering of a bribe to a woman of lower degree "conceal[s] beneath the conventional pastoral trappings the intrigues of minnesingers and troubadours with women of the small artizan or village proprietor class." However, the "real peasant women," she assumes, "would scarcely have been above the noblemen's servants" and therefore not have been noticed let alone "offered presents and fine words." Nicolette could fall in this category of "woman of lower degree" for she is of unknown parentage and "bought of the Saracens" (with all the racial and sexual implications of this phrase), which is enough to make her a déclassée for her suitor's father. If we include Lee's explanation in a

re-reading of the respective passage in Pater, the latter's account sounds almost hypocritical:

These adventures are of the simplest sort, adventures which seem to be chosen for the happy occasion they afford of keeping the eye of the fancy, perhaps the outward eye, fixed on pleasant objects, a garden, a ruined tower, the little hut of flowers . . . All the charm of the piece is in its details, in a turn of peculiar lightness and grace given to the situations and traits of sentiment, especially in its quaint fragments of early French prose.
(Renaissance 15)

Unlike Pater, Lee often takes sides with the neglected or displaced "simple people" whose stories and whose art she felt she had to salvage from oblivion. The antagonism between "high art" and "folk art" can be found in several essays in Euphorion. In "The School of Boiardo," for example, she speaks at length of a popular poet of the early Renaissance, Luigi Pulci, who adapted the chivalric texts to the language of "Florentine wool-workers, housewives, cheese-sellers, and ragamuffins, crammed with the slang of the market-place. . . ." (EU 1: 92). Lee's interest in Pulci is to show how the comical effect of his poems appealed to the common people, whose social reality was remote from chivalrous high culture. In a side remark she corrects a contemporary (mis)conception of the Renaissance in respect to Pulci's achievements. "For the men of the Renaissance, no matter how philosophized and cultured, retained the pleasure

in mere incident which we moderns seem to have given over to children and savages. . . ." (EU 1: 91).

Lee's emphasis on incidental, playful, or fairy-tale-like aspects, which she locates among the unsophisticated country people and their traditions, occurs often in opposition to "high" art. In this context, we may remember her definition of the supernatural in "Faustus and Helena," in which she presents the original Faustus legend as infinitely more powerful in its effect on our imagination than the finite artistic form, as, for instance, Goethe's version.²⁹ In this essay, she includes in the shaping forces of culture explicitly the activities of the people, in other words, "not only the priest and the poet, but (of) the village boor" (77). The "real" supernatural effect, i.e. the one produced in our imagination, is induced by the indefinite memory of the legend which remains alive under the artistic transformation of Goethe, whose Helen has "only the cold, bloodless intellectual life which could be infused by enthusiastic studies of ancient literature and art. . . ." (102). On the whole, Lee regards the eighteenth and nineteenth-century evocations of Helen as the essentially modern passionate nostalgic craving for the past," and "Goethe's Faust feels for Helen as Goethe himself might have felt, as Winckelman felt for a lost antique statue. . . ." (101). One cannot ignore Lee's criticism of the modern

spirit here made obvious through her juxtaposition of the formless but highly imaginative folktale supernatural with the artful, but "bloodless" art of the modern spirit.

She construes a similar opposition of "high" and "low" culture in the portraits of two poets from the same late-fifteenth/early-sixteenth century school, Ariosto and Boiardo. In "The School of Boiardo," she compares the former's exquisite scholarly style with the amateurish verses of Boiardo.

Ariosto is a man of far more varied genius; he is an artist while Boiardo is an amateur; he is learned in arranging and ornamenting. . . . Moreover, he is a scholarly person of a scholarly time: he is familiar with the classics, and, what is more important, he is familiar with the language in which he is writing. He writes exquisitely harmonious, supple, and brilliant Tuscan verse . . . while poor Boiardo jogs along in a language which is not the Lombard dialect in which he speaks, and which is very uncouth and awkward, as is every pure language for a provincial. . . . (EU II: 103)

This text goes beyond a comparison of two Renaissance poets, especially, because Lee prefaces her analysis with "I personally prefer Boiardo," explicitly discarding a rational or objective explanation. Nevertheless, her "personal" preference is well supported by quite a few solid and reasonable arguments which, at times, contain blatant criticism of Ariosto's stilted learnedness, of which she still seems to be envious. When she sneers at Ariosto, her tone reminds us of her critique of medieval poetry in "The

Outdoor Poetry" in which she slights the too beautiful picture of medieval and Paterian romance alike.

I confess that I am bored by the beautifully written moral and allegorical preludes of Ariosto's cantos; I would willingly give all his aphorism and all his mythology to get quickly to the story. (EU II: 104)

The summary of her criticism, "The picture painted by Ariosto is finer, but you see too much of the painter," then, almost echoes some of the contemporary comments on Pater's Imaginary Portraits.

We may wonder to what extent she identified herself with "poor Boiardo," and how much of her misgivings towards contemporary scholarship have informed her portrait of Ariosto. The comparison of the two poets reads almost like a comparison of herself--an amateur like Boiardo--with her formally educated male colleagues, whose language she yet had to borrow. On the other hand, she repeatedly emphasizes how "amused" and "delighted" she is by Boiardo's poetry, which appears to her like "the world of Prince Charming, the real realm of the Faëry Queen." Again, it is the folkloristic fairy-tale charm of the Renaissance which she puts above its "revival" of classical culture. Folkloristic traditions to her represent a kind of "paganism," which springs from the surroundings of the locals. This "rudimentary art," which she later describes as expression of "the art of the early Renaissance as well as that of

Persia and India, of Constantinople, of every peasant potter all through the world" to her represents "the other half of the imaginative art of the Renaissance, the school of intellectual decoration."³⁰ It is Lee's identification with this "pagan fairyland" of the early painters and the peasants of the Renaissance which marks her position as distinct from Pater's modern artist perspective.

We may say that Pater and Lee differ in the implied subject positions of their texts in spite of the similarity in their historical-aesthetic method. Pater selects historical moments between the Middle Ages and the "present," to express the "temperament" of the author metonymically linked to a set of Renaissance ideas and attitudes. His "moments" arrange themselves like chords along an imaginary center that runs through them.

Lee also collects impressions through a subjective view, but hers is inflected by a different subject position, which is not confined to the focal lens of "high art." In Baldwin (1886) we find an image that seems to give the best illustration of this uncentered subjectivity, as she writes, "my life seems hanging flakewise, like the wool of a sheep on every stone and bramble . . ."³¹ Lee's perspective is thus tied to a place or an areal, which can become "narrow and fatally imprisoning," but which, as a result of these limits, also sharpens and broadens the view.

It is indeed the only place I have possessed in absolute familiarity . . . the only place where I have been obliged to take an interest in every thing, or rather within whose limitations I have had to find everything. (Baldwin 9)

Similarly, Lee's "moments" in history are located in a place or an area, in which "the smallest trifle carried value."

The way in which this differentiated perspective of the place becomes effective for her historical text can be shown in her Euphorion essay, "The Outdoor Poetry," where she digs up the peasant songs of a neglected poet like Lorenzo dei Medici while at the same time bringing into focus a likewise neglected social group. In this way she brings to the surface "trifles," (or "silences") of history.³²

She presents her perspectival "corrections" not necessarily in opposition to dominant opinions, but as supplements. So she always makes sure to show her awareness of the work of her predecessors--which "has already been carried out with all the perfection due to specially adapted gifts, to infinite patience and ingenuity, occasionally amounting almost to genius,"--only to show that her own project goes beyond them, as "besides such marvels of historic mapping as I have described . . . there are yet other kinds of work which may be done" (EU I: 9). It is part of her agenda to show that the quest for knowledge and fact is not sufficient as a method of dealing with the past. She repeatedly asserts that she is aware of other evaluations of

history, but she makes a point of describing her own preferences:

Comparing together Boiardo and Ariosto, I am of course, aware of the infinite advantage of the latter . . . The picture painted by Ariosto is finer, but you see too much of the painter. . . . I personally prefer Boiardo; and perhaps the best reason for my preference is the irrational one that it gives me more pleasure. My preferences, my impressions, I have said, are in this matter, much less critical than personal. Hence I can speak of Boiardo only as he affects me. (EU I: 105)

She appears a little pedestrian when she belabors her familiarity with the judgments of the academy in order to prove her expertise. However, we should not be astonished at these remarks, for a woman venturing into the domain of theoretical writing surely had to prove her "worthiness." If we want to understand Lee's struggle for a female position in history, it may be helpful to remember, how the situation of an "educated" woman from the middle-class shaped the style of this struggle. Unlike her male colleagues, Lee never had any formal or institutional education.³³ She was instructed by her mother and several governesses. What she learned about art, history, philosophy, and science was piecemeal and often self-taught. In this respect, Lee's background resembled that of many female writers at the time. Her image of the "patched-up" garment of history in Euphorion, then, aptly reflects this condition.

Vernon Lee had to enter the field so-to-speak as a man. Not only were the actual historians men, but their subject matter, too, had been shaped by the experience of men. The "universal" subject in this discourse, which pretended to transcend gender, was automatically understood as male. Therefore, subject matter and methodology were determined by what can be called male interest, which in nineteenth-century historiography meant that the focus was on "great men" and high policy. Moreover, the symbolic systems of the Victorians identified certain intellectual modes with the nature of man or woman. Analytical and systematic methodologies involving logic and abstract thought were considered "masculine," whereas the less structured intuitive and emotional modes of fantasy and fiction were more closely related to the "female" character. In accordance with the social and political structure, these essentialist assumptions of difference were arranged hierarchically. Thus, the "masculine" character of scientific methodologies, which historiography increasingly adopted, were ranked as superior. A woman's writing on historical subjects was read in comparison to male contributions. Her treatment of a certain subject was measured in male terms, which means that she was automatically compared to those writers, who had already established their connoisseurship in the respective field.

In other words, she became another but somehow lesser man. Therefore, the highest praise that Vernon Lee's writing on the Renaissance could achieve, was to be compared, for instance, to Ruskin, Pater, or Symonds.³⁴ But if her historical treatises were immediately classified and subordinated, her innovative views could not be recognized as long as she was read within the prevailing patterns of gender and genre.

As I have shown earlier, Lee's definition of history as a place is a decisive move for her development of a different position, independent from her male peers. Her identification with a place became a textual strategy that operated--similar to Pater's use of works of art--as a mode of perception or as an expression of her perceiving consciousness. Her association of a historical place and time with a garment then marks the connection with her "self" which, as she tells us in Baldwin, "hangs flakewise like the wool of sheep" on her surroundings. At the same time, she regards the immediate reality of streets, buildings and landscapes as more valuable for historical studies than written texts.

Impressions are not derived from description, and thoughts are not suggested by books. . . . You find everywhere your facts without opening a book. The explanation which I have tried to give of the exact manner in which medieval art was influenced by the remains of antiquity, came like a flash during a rainy morning in the Pisan Campo Santo; the working out and

testing of that explanation in its details was a matter of going from one church or gallery to the other. . . . (EU I: 19)

Lee literally "walks" her readers through her argument, which becomes a matter of showing rather than telling. Through the palpable contact with historical settings, she sees herself more directly in touch with the past than the mere theoretical writer whose knowledge is always mediated. Having grown up with the local stories and legends of her governesses and the architectural jumble of Italian cities, Lee sees her personal history conflated with "world" history in certain corners of the Italy of her youth, which to her are present and past, microcosm and macrocosm at the same time.

I can remember all this, and the effort to construct myself a universe out of this tiny spot [a small Italian village]. The same happened with a more mature myself, greater wants and richer surroundings here; the same making out of this place my microcosm of the world. . . . As with nature, so with associations. I had to make up the Past out of this place. (Baldwin 10)

Lee draws on these experiences in her introduction to Euphorion, where she establishes her methodology of personal impressionism. As she does not conceive history in universal terms but in the somewhat individualistic aesthetic notions of her own *Anschauung* she cannot identify with traditional schools of historiography, which construct the past in abstract models in the garb of "facts."

She explains this non-identification with her different entry into the field of history through the subject matter itself. To reinforce her uncommon position she repeatedly stresses her intuitive and spontaneous response to art and history, which she puts above the reading of scholarly texts, as it is unmediated by stultifying scholarship. That is why she claims to have studied the eighteenth century in Italy first, as it had not yet been "exhumed and examined and criticised and classified" and therefore offered her a chance to approach the period more directly, through its books and artefacts, which still bore "the dust of their own day."³⁵ For the same reasons, she initially refused to read Symonds's volumes on Italian Renaissance literature "from a fear that finding myself doubtless forestalled by him in various appreciations, I might deprive my essays of what I feel to be their principal merit, namely, the spontaneity and wholeness of personal impression."³⁶ Lee emphasizes that, unlike the "great" eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians, such as Winckelmann, Goethe, Burckhardt, Pater, and Symonds, who came to Italy after they studied its history theoretically, she actually lived in the "reality" of the historical landscape and experienced it, before she learned the scholarly terms.

I have seen the concrete things, and what I might call the concrete realities of thought and feeling left behind by the Renaissance, and then tried to obtain

from books some notion of the original shape and manner of wearing these relics, rags and tatters of a past civilization. (EU I: 16)³⁷

She carries over this image of clothing into the next paragraph to an "Italy . . . [who] was never able to weave for herself a new, modern civilization." The metonymic relation between Lee's writerly self and her allegory of Renaissance Italy lingers on, when she weeps over the century-old "victimization" of Renaissance Italy whose garments were worn and torn through "the rough usage of other nations . . . their utter neglect by the long seventeenth century, their hasty patchings up . . . by the happy-go-lucky practicalness of the eighteenth century and the Revolution" (EU I: 17). This conflation of her subject (the Italian Renaissance) with her identity as a writer of history, allows us to see her subjectivity as if detached from herself, but at the same time, in a kind of double. The image of the patched-up garment suggests the humbleness of an allegedly inferior member--the female historian or "her" Renaissance--among those who wear the "garments of modern civilization." However, the ragged Italian Renaissance has been strong enough to impress the other European nations so much that they believed "it must be brand new, and of the very latest fashion."

In this allegory, Lee slights the nineteenth-century craze for the Renaissance and the trend to find in it the

predecessors of modern men. What in her eyes these modern historians have failed to see, however, is that the Renaissance is still present in seemingly insignificant details of everyday life, such as the "seams of battered bricks of the solid old escutcheoned palaces" or the "broken tiles and plaster" (EU I: 18). She uses "modern" in a double sense. On the one hand, her "modern" contrasts with Pater's concept of the "modern spirit." In her text, it describes insensitive and unhistoric self-centeredness, in other words, qualities which obfuscate any sensitive discriminating perception. On the other hand, "modern" implies a stylistic cleansing process which in Pater's terms works "quite cleanly, casting off all *débris*."³⁸ Lee's mode of perception and discrimination, however, includes debris, "mere useless and befouled odds and ends, like the torn shreds which lie among the decaying kitchen refuse, the broken tiles and plaster . . ." (EU I: 18). These "unpractical and old-fashioned things" are for her an organic and therefore, vital part of the historical landscape of the Renaissance. She does not select her materials just from the elevated sights, but also looks at "things of little weight, mere trifles of artistic material," which she finds "equally fascinating" (EU, I: 8). She maintains a certain skepticism towards prevailing modes of historical inquiry that strives to be general,

perfectionist, and timeless. Her repeated allusions to their imperfection and deficiency, then, are meant to show that their limitations are a result of their historicity and greater "realism." In Renaissance Fancies and Studies, for instance, she reminds the reader that in the search for beauty and art, "we should remember it is as we sometimes throw away noble ore, for lack of skill to separate it from base alloy" (251).

Lest the historian miss the "noble ore," she maintains that history should be approached like a "historic habit," i.e. the constant including of the past in the present, which creates historical perspective and consciousness. To her, history is as much composed of unconscious habit as it is of conscious thought--and she makes it sound as if the former takes precedence. Habitual memory in history, however, is not to be found in its choice masterworks but in the less outstanding and more repetitive examples of traditional workmanship.

This is one of the peculiarities of rudimentary art . . . of every peasant potter all through the world: that, not knowing very well its own aims, it fills its imperfect work with suggestion of all manner of things which it loves . . . and lays hold of us, like fragments of verse, by suggestiveness, quite as much as by pictorial realisation. And upon this depends the other half of the imaginative art of the the Renaissance. . . . (RFS 95)

Literally, we find the habitual memory recorded in the patterns and decorations, which were carried out by the

multitude of artisans, craftsmen, or dilettante artists, in other words, the more concrete phenotypes of Michelet's "people."³⁹

Lee seems to assume the role of biographer of neglected groups outside "mainstream" history. These marginalized groups she finds among the so-called minor or even mediocre artists, such as she describes in her imaginary portrait of Domenico Neroni, a minor sculptor, for whom Vasari has but a few words in another portrait. Neroni "resembled in some respects his great contemporary Leonardo," but the former is from a distinctly lower class of painters (socially and artistically) as his workshop is "full of cobwebs and dust, littered with the remains of frugal and unsavoury meals, and resolutely closed to the rich and noble persons in whose company Leonardo delighted" (RFS 174).

In Domenico Neroni, Lee tries to recreate a late medieval mind still unscathed by the knowledge of the "superiority of antiquity." Neroni is a basically "good Christian" whose "unhappy mania" turned him into a fervent anatomist who did not eschew "handling horrible remains." Most of all, he is "a mere handicraftsman, [who] had not learned from the study of Cicero and Plato to examine and understand the difference between reality and fiction" (210). We may say that Neroni, is the "everyman" version of Pater's exquisite artists, who is led into some sacriligious

pagan ritual by a cunning humanist (Filarete) with a "sinister reputation." Their attempt to conjure up a pagan god is discovered and both are mutilated and burnt by the rigid regime of Savonarola. Although Neroni's end seems overly cruel and unjust, we cannot say that Lee sympathizes with him; she merely gives a "realistic" account of the historical circumstances under which Leonardo and also Botticelli were working, too. The clear absence of something like an antique or even "modern" spirit (in Pater's sense) or the lack of direction towards some time-transcending moments is a significant difference from Pater's portraits of which we feel only too often reminded, not only through the painters' names, but also through certain "aesthetic" formulas, which Lee here uses in parody of "Leonardo Da Vinci" when she applies them to Neroni's almost perverse delight in anatomy.

And that St. John in the Wilderness--how beautiful are not his ribs, showing under the wasted pectoral muscles; and how one sees that the *radius* rolls across the *ulna* in the forearm; surely one's heart, rather than the statue, must be made of stone if one can contemplate without rapture the exquisite rendering of the texture where the shinbone stands out from the muscles of the legs. Such must have been the works of those famous Romans and Greeks, Phidias and Praxiteles. (RFSt 179)

In her studies and historical representations of medieval craftsmen and peasants (particularly in "The Outdoor Poetry"⁴⁰), Lee raises neglected groups to historical

subjects, as she sees in them the bearers of historical continuity. The Tuscan's folk legends and peasant songs, for instance, gradually picked up medieval romance stories from vagabond ballad-singers and story-tellers, and patched up the foreign materials "with rustic ideals, feelings, and images."

I feel that the adoption of Courtly medieval poetry by the Italian peasantry of the Renaissance can be compared more significantly than at first seemed with the adoption of a once fashionable garb by country folk. The peasant pulled about this Courtly lyricism, oppressively tight in its conventional fit and starched with elaborate rhetorical embroideries; turned it inside out, twisted a bit here, a bit there, ripped open seam after seam, patched and repatched with stuffs and stitches of its own; and then wore the whole thing as it had never been intended to be worn. . . . (EU I: 150-51)

Lee describes how materials from "high culture" trickled down to the lower classes who adapted these materials to their own lifestyles and thus became simultaneously perpetuators and innovators of cultural heritage.⁴¹ The innovative aspect of the Tuscan peasant poetry then occurs in Lorenzo dei Medici's peasant songs, in which she finds the lifestyles of the rural classes realistically recorded. She finds that there are "things about which certain historic epochs are strangely silent; so much so, indeed, that the breaking of the silence impresses us almost as the more than human breaking of a spell. . . ." (EU I: 116) Therefore, she proposes to identify those moments in history

when the silence is interrupted, i.e. when formerly invisible parts of society can be brought into sight. She identifies such a moment in Lorenzo dei Medici's poetry, as shown above, which "has sung no longer of knights and of spring" and therefore, has "broken the long spell of the Middle Ages" (EU I: 165).

Again, Lee becomes an advocate for the neglected, when she criticizes the one-sided emphasis of historiography on the despot and "exquisite Politician" instead of on "the most versatile poet of the Renaissance." Lorenzo dei Medici is "new" and "modern" and appears as the most perfect representative of the Renaissance man, "because he is so completely the man of impressions" (EU I: 153). Although Lee echoes Pater's diction here, the implications are slightly different as she sets Lorenzo apart from Pater's refined artistic and scholarly types in The Renaissance--and particularly from himself.

"[Lorenzo] is naturally attracted most by what is most opposed to the academic, Virgilian, Horatian, or Petrarchesque aestheticism of his contemporaries; he is essentially a realist. . . . Instead of seeking, like most of his contemporaries, to be Greek, Roman, or medieval by turns, he preferred trying on all the tricks of thought and feeling which he remarked among the unlettered townsfolk. (EU I: 154)

With unconcealed delight, Lee describes the quaint and picturesque details in his poem, "Nencia da Barberino," so "that we almost forget verses and song, and actually see the

pulling, twisting, and cutting of the gold-threads" (EU, I: 155). She points out that, in a strict sense, this poem is not even a work of art because it lacks the element of form. In fact, "the construction, which appears to be nowhere, is in reality a masterpiece." Compared with Boiardo, Ariosto, or Dante, she concedes, Lorenzo's poem is not beautiful or even poetic. However, in her mind, his work is a piece of historical reality which still reaches beyond its time because "he has given us a peasant's thoughts, actions, hopes, fears; he has given us the peasant himself, his house his fields, and his sweetheart, as they exist even now" (EU I: 159).

Lorenzo dei Medici is not described as an outstanding artist or even a genius; in fact, Lee sees his artistic personality as rather commonplace. His creation, therefore, comes into being as "the result of those Tuscan peasant songs," and yet his work is not "the poetry of the Renaissance peasant; it is the poem made out of his reality." (EU I: 155). She describes his art here as a function of the cooperation between artist and community. As she remarks elsewhere, the collective artistic skills and traditions of the lower classes, still need the perfection of an artist who is in touch with these traditions and therefore able to recognize and refine their beauty. Thus

Lee sees the artist as a mediator between popular and "high" culture.

Eventually, Lee sees all "high art" as transitory and ephemeral whereas communal art creates historical continuity and permanence. "Lorenzo is gone," as even more eminent or more recent artists have, but what has endured is our impression of the peasant, "everything changes, except the country and the peasant." At that point she closes the circle that connects the impressionist historian Vernon Lee with the impressionist Lorenzo, when she describes her own perception of the contemporary peasants and their farms "all about Florence; farms which I pass everyday. . . ." She raises the peasants to historical agents, and eventually, not only a neglected social group, but Vernon Lee herself emerges visible from her text.

Lee's portrayal of Lorenzo dei Medici's poetry shows that she sees the function of artist and historian in their service to the community. She picks up this argument again in her essay "The Imaginative Art of the Renaissance,"⁴² which reads almost like a sequel to "The Outdoor Poetry." In the later piece, she seems to align her own point of view more clearly in sympathy for the "sufferers" in history. After Lorenzo dei Medici's first "true" innovation in the Renaissance, she sees the next step in modern artistic

development in sixteenth-century Germany, with the engravers, who familiarize the common people with the

expression not for the multitude at large, fresco or mosaic that could be elaborated by a sceptical or godless artist, but a re-explanation as from man to man and friend . . . The Virgin, they have discovered, is not the grandly dressed lady, always in the very finest brocade, with the very finest manners . . . but a real wife and mother with real milk in her breasts. . . . (RFSt 166-117)

For Lee this development in German art is a groundbreaking factor in new "imaginative conceptions on the part of the individual." Like Lorenzo's poetry, this "Teutonic" art represents the reality of everyday people, but this time, this reality is given back to them in the new commodity of the print, which makes art accessible to every man and woman. At the same time, however, she is also skeptical of this kind of "mass" art. "We get the benefit of the fancy and feelings of this individual, but we are at the mercy, also of his stupidity and vulgarity" (RFSt 122).

But she quickly dismisses her skepticism when she links the engravings by Holbein and Dürer with another new artistic development in the eighteenth century, which resembles what she "found at the beginning of the fourteenth," and this is "the terrible portfolio of Goya's etchings called the Disasters of War." The mentioning of Goya comes as a surprise, as one would not necessarily connect this painter of the most ruthless aspects of human

misery and torture with Lee's earlier aesthetic professions. However, from her conception of the artist-historian as the recorder of the neglected or disadvantaged classes in history, Goya has a legitimate if not the most prominent place.

Like Dürer and Rembrandt, the great Spaniard is at once extremely realistic and extremely imaginative. But his realism means fidelity, not to the real aspect of things, of the thing in itself, so to speak, but to the way in which things will appear to the spectator at a given moment. He isolates what you might call a case, separating it from the multitude of similar cases, giving you one execution where several must be going on, one firing off of canon, one or two figures in a burning or a massacre...(RFSt, 131-32; my underlining)

What Lee describes here of Goya's technique, follows precisely Pater's outline of aesthetic criticism in The Renaissance. Purposefully swerving from Arnold's doctrine, Pater had declared "'To see the object as in itself it really is' . . . is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (xix). For Lee, as for Pater, aestheticism means truthfulness to the artist's impression. But Lee wants to see the aesthetic method employed for a "sound" historical purpose, which is to give expression to the minds and feelings of the disadvantaged classes.

. . . these scenes are not merely rather such as they were recollected than as they really were seen; they are such as they were recollected in the minds and feelings of peasants and soldiers, of people who could not free their attention to arrange these matters logically, to give them their relative logical value. (RFSt 132)

She sees the value of Goya's art in his self-effacement behind the work. Similar to Lorenzo, who does not let the poetic form intrude, "Goya does not for a moment let us suspect the presence of the artist, the quasi-writer." This almost romantic idea of the immediacy of artistic expression, also reminds us of the way Lee positions herself in history. When earlier on, she legitimated her role as a different kind of historian, with her immediate access to the sources, unmediated by the historiographic apparatus. Like Goya, she does not look at history from a point "as safely separated as (are) those who look on from the infuriated bulls in an arena" (EU I: 13), but as a participant in a "real" place with "real" people. It is the aspect of participation or partaking which forms an important link between the writer Vernon Lee and "the sufferings, real and imaginative, of the real sufferers" (RFSt 133).

Lee's turn towards the questions of social reform, which marks her first major revision of the "pure" aestheticism of her youth, actually occurs several years before in Juvenilia (1887). She does not discard her earlier aesthetic concepts but so-to-speak historicizes them as a bygone but important stage in her intellectual development. Her foreword, addressed to Carlo Placchi, shows that she has

added "perspective" to her youthful and largely untroubled view.

And therefore also, my dear Carlo, we must look at many things that are not beautiful; we must bring home to our feelings many things that are not good; we must think out many matters that are bitter and uncertain; we must recognize that we are no longer children, we have other interests besides those which I have called "Juvenilia." (Juvenilia 19-20)

By these other interests she means an awareness of the privileged position of her class and a recognition of the responsibility towards "the great mass of mankind, which has neither peace nor dignity, nor beauty of life." Lee shows to the reader that she has gained her new vision through her visit to the working-class slums and socialist gatherings in the Newcastle area. Again, it is the character of the place, not the knowledge gained from books, which shapes her view. In Juvenilia she then spatializes her concepts of time by linking them to certain countries so that, "while Italy makes one think of the past; England, inevitably, leads one to speculate upon the future: each country is a key to what is not yet, or no longer, mere present" (13).

Lee's increasing emphasis on social issues in her writing has inflected her aestheticism with an alternative, and we may say, female vision. Although she still "wears" Pater's aesthetic "garment" in the 1890's, she has marked her position as different from his by locating her perspective with neglected social figures and groups in

which she could include herself as a female historian. She does not explicitly speak of her female position; it would take another decade for her to become more outspoken about feminist issues. However, the consistency with which she pursues the history of neglected or overlooked groups and individuals resembles the manner in which she describes herself. The dedication page of The Handling of Words, for instance, reads almost like a reminder of her existence to the audience. "To the many writers I have read and the few readers who have read me."⁴³

Lee often adopted a similarly humble attitude when she spoke of Walter Pater whom she regarded as a kind of role model and mentor. On her yearly visits to England, she regularly spent a few days at his house where they discussed their literary projects. Pater reviewed her books favorably, although he occasionally criticized certain shortcomings in her style, as, for instance in his review of Juvenilia.⁴⁴ Lee dedicated Euphorion to him and paid him a tribute in the "Valedictory" to Renaissance Fancies and Studies published one year after his death.

Lee draws on Pater's aesthetic strategies to express her own female experience in history. Thus, she manages to open new cultural spaces for historical inquiry. For instance, in her portrait of Lorenzo dei Medici, Lee applies one of Pater's leading questions in The Renaissance ("In

whom did the stir, the genius, the sentiment of the period find itself?") while she modifies it for her own purposes by widening the social basis of her inquiry. Her focus is then directed towards the community, not just the single artist. When Pater identifies the age of Lorenzo as one of those happy eras, in which "the many interests of the intellectual world combine in one complete type of general culture," he does not speak of peasant poetry, but focusses on the intellect and imagination of those prominent personalities who make up the volume of his Renaissance studies.

Here, artists and philosophers and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts. There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate.⁴⁵

In Pater's description, the sense of communality also prevails, but this is the communality of "those whom the action of the world has elevated" (The Renaissance xxiv), in other words, an elite. In fact, Pater's sensitive, ever-yearning figures are constructed as alienated or at least distant from the community. As the focus is on the individual, the actions of the community sometimes appear strange or hostile, as for instance, in the uncontrollable demonic mob in "Denys L'Auxerrois" in his Imaginary Portraits.

Vernon Lee not only conceives the (rural) community on a broader basis than Walter Pater, she also identifies with lower social classes and locates her subjectivity among or in relation to them. From her "plebeian" perspective, she can construe Lorenzo dei Medici as the "true" Renaissance Man and then Goya as an anti-Winckelmann. The parallel with Pater's "Winckelmann" in The Renaissance comes to mind, as the German aesthete, also "produces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance" (The Renaissance, 146) similar to Goya, whose "struggling individual imagination" gives us "what we found at the beginning of the fourteenth century" (RFSt, 131). However, the "narrow exclusive interest of Winckelmann" in Pater's description is very different from Lee's Goya, who "does not for a moment let us suspect the presence of the artist" and who rather gives us the impressions of "the minds and feelings of peasants and soldiers" (RFSt 132). Lee's texts repeatedly bring up her disapproval of the "presence" of the artist, as for instance, in her comparison of Boiardo and Ariosto. Indirectly, her criticism may also apply to Pater, although she never makes it explicit. However, when she writes in Renaissance Fancies and Studies that, in his early days, Pater was an aesthete "in the very narrow sense of twenty years ago," whose shortcoming was to "regard literature as

an end, and not as a means (256)," it is obvious that she did not approve of his early hedonism.

Lee's difference from Pater may also be traced in her critical view of medieval romance poetry. In "The Outdoor Poetry" in Euphorion she exemplifies the emergence of the modern spirit in Lorenzo's "realistic" songs of peasantry and nature, whereas Pater locates the beginning of the Renaissance in France, and in the courtly romances. For Lee, Lorenzo dei Medici breaks one of those periods of "silence" as he makes visible the realism of peasant life, which had been concealed under the monotony and conventionality of French medieval poetry.

this medieval spring . . . neither of the shepherd, nor of the farmer, nor of any man to whom spring brings work and anxiety and hope of gain; it is a mere vague spring of gentle-folk, or at all events of well-to-do burgesses, taking their pleasure on the lawns of castle parks. . . . (EU I: 123)

Lee derides the beautiful "Dresden china" images of courtly poetry as "conventional pastoral entrappings," which conceal social difference. Courtly poetry makes the plight of the serf invisible by replacing the reality of feudalism by images borrowed from the antique bucolic tradition. Over several pages, Lee demonstrates that the somewhat schematized and idealized image of the peasant has been perpetuated throughout history in medieval poetry and art, rather as a mode of representation for upper-class desires

than a portrayal of the serfs. Whereas the idyllic image of the peasantry was locked into the monotony of conventional aesthetic forms, the baser aspects of social reality were shaped into a different negative figure in medieval poetry, in whose language the name of the serf has become "synonymous with every baseness." Thus the language has perpetuated images of a social group in the fragmented and derogatory terms of a higher class. What we can study in courtly poetry, then, is the relationship of the upper class to the multitude of lower-class people. The pictures themselves were designed to conceal, as she shows in a striking example.

Lee exposes the limitations of the aesthetic as a method for historical inquiry. By the same token, she is skeptical of Pater's "concealment" as she accuses him of having left out the "ugly" fact of social grievance in his "beautiful" account of "Aucassin et Nicolette." Lee's outspoken criticism of Pater's aesthetic "blindness" to social issues in this episode, is a single instance in her earlier text but still marks the point when she begins to position herself away from Pater--although more subtle otherwise--through what we may call a social female perspective.

Vernon Lee's "New Historicism"

It appears that in 1895, she feels in a stronger position, one from which she no longer has to prove herself as a historical writer. In her essay collection, Renaissance Fancies and Studies (1895), she is more decided in her historical perspective, and no longer tries to conform her arguments closely to other contemporary positions. Nor does she have to legitimate her method. She selects her own subjects with much more certainty and less need for justification than in the earlier book, which makes her tone appear altogether less "dogmatic," and her criticism less indignant. She nonchalantly discards the study of such great but corrupt men as the Malatestas and Borgias--"good heavens! why should we sicken ourselves with the thought of this long dead and done for abomination?" She sweeps aside a portion of the historical canon by her own choice. She dismisses the search for ultimate meaning by construing history as "coincidence of contrary movements," and she criticizes historical methods which work with certain "unconscious analogies," i.e. with the habitual knowledge that shapes the reality of history but that remains invisible itself.

Because individual interests always infuse historical inquiry anyway, she proposes to get in touch with the pleasures of the past. What these pleasures are, however,

depends on the individual investigator, for "every individual has in the Past affinities, possibilities or spiritual satisfaction differing somewhat from those of every other" (RFSt, 245). Lee uses pleasure as a rhetorical means to demonstrate that she feels no longer obliged to address the questions given by the period historians, but rather chooses to speak about small select aspects of her own choice.

Lee also assumes the point of view of the producers of art, not that of the sensitive individual artist of the late nineteenth century, but of the artist as community craftsman, whose artistic desire interacts with task, material, and skill. This concept of the productive side of Renaissance art, in a way, reflects the way Lee imagined her own female working style, which is different from the aloof image of the "genius."

The "Valedictory" in Renaissance Fancies and Studies can be read as a repositioning of her own subjectivity that includes a redefinition of her relationship to her mentors, in particular, to Walter Pater. Her reassessment of his role as aesthetic critic not only recognizes him as her "master" but also includes subtle misgivings about his earlier days. At the same time she stresses the virtue of his later development, namely as the author of Marius the Epicurean, with a stylistic finesse that could have come from his own

pen. Lee's assessment is no longer that of a youthful devotee, but reflects a self-assured writer, who uses her Paterian training to make her own selections in history. Her words from Baldwin, "my teacher yet made by me" have a different ring here. The "me" has passed from a subject-object to a subject.

I have tried to show that Lee's historical texts reveal what we may call a "second vision," which means that they allow us to see a woman's text under a seemingly unmarked text and the sometimes annoying flood of insignificant details. However, if we read Lee in her own terms, in other words, if we assume a readerly perspective that temporarily suspends certain rules, her language forms a logic, whose meaning arranges itself into a vision of different subject positions, which the discursive conventions of her time did not allow her to put into more explicit or precise terms.

Lee is configuring her subjectivity beneath her texts in a constant struggle not only with contemporary intellectual positions but also with the difficulty of defining her own. Some stretches of her essays read like repetitions of other historical discourses, most notably Pater's. These kinds of citations serve two functions. On the one hand she can ward off conservative accusations of her "mere" impressionism, while making her choice of style appear all the more autonomous and convincing. On the other

hand, citations can operate as a kind of feminist doubling and thus open up spaces of difference. As Derrida claims, all terms are citational, i.e. it is the very repeatability of a term that demonstrates its inscription in a system of meaning. Also, any repetition, no matter how identical, is always also a difference, and it is that space of difference which allows for a feminist reading.⁴⁶ As citation carries less content of its own, it helps the writer to resist her own ideological blind spots and to concentrate on her strategies as conscious parts of cultural formation.

In her alternative text, Lee forms her perspective through and around social groups which were made invisible in the discourses of art and history. To be sure, Lee does not provide us with a thorough analysis of social or economic factors in history, but basically jaunts through history in the mode of an aesthetic impressionist. However, by including and thus elevating the point of view of the neglected onto the level of historiography, she suggests different possibilities for historical identification including her own.

Pater's language created for Lee the conditions on which she could devise an alternative, female discourse; but she still had to speak for herself and create her own presence. Lee's subjectivity emerges under Pater's "influence" but from her choice. One puzzling phrase in

Baldwin may give us the key to this subjectivity--"my master yet, made by me"--which deconstructs the relationship between master and pupil, subject and object. It turns hierarchy against itself and puts choice at the center of her discourse. Only if she chooses her master he will be her master. But what kind of master is a master by choice of others? A representative of the people's will? Of Vernon Lee's will? A nice piece of logic or a trick of the mind? "Choose and understand," she says, "for I cannot."

I am the pupil of Baldwin, the thing made by him, or he is my master, yet made by me . . . better far than I and wiser, but perhaps a little less human, you are not myself; you are my mentor, my teacher, my power of being taught; and you live, dear abstract friend on the borderline between fact and fancy. (14)

Notes

1. From now on, Euphorion (1884) will appear as EU in quotations and Renaissance Fancies and Studies (1895) as RFSt.

2. In the introduction to Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy (London: W. Satchell, 1880), 2, she complains that the eighteenth century in Italy has not been considered as a reality, except by a few specialists who only looked for antiquarian detail, "laborious bookworms, who find broken broken and minute fragments of the eighteenth century as they do of every other century,..."

3. Renaissance Fancies and Studies (London: Smith, Elder, 1895), especially, 248-254.

4. "The Sacrifice," Euphorion, 27-54.

5. Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox (1927; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966) 111.

6. Lewis, 110.

7. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 238.

8. Baldwin, 5.

9. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 252.

10. Richard Dellamora, "Critical Impressionism as Anti-Phallogocentric Strategy," Pater in the 1990's ed. Laurel Brake & Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991) 127-142.

11. Dellamora, 136.

12. For a more detailed discussion of the possibilities of deconstruction for historical readings see Jane Moore "Promises, Promises: the Fictional Philosophy in Mary Wollstonecraft's 'Vindication of the Rights of Woman,'" The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989).

13. "Denys L'Auxerrois," Walter Pater, Imaginary Portraits (1887; London: Macmillan, 1922) 54.

14. Michelet, for instance, saw in it an antinomian revolution which laid the foundation for modern rationalism and bourgeois freedom, whereas Burckhardt emphasized its role for the emergence of the "Renaissance man."

15. She felt entitled--and consciously different from her predecessors such as Goethe and Winckelmann--to speak for the Renaissance as an advocate, which she literally does in "The Sacrifice," Euphorion, 1, 27-54.

16. Jacob Burckhardt also found that universal and abstract notions could not grasp the diversity of the Renaissance. To stress its different function in traditional historiography, he asserted--like Vernon Lee--that it was a condition not an epoch. Burckhardt uses "Renaissance" somewhat polemically, against traditional periodization which had developed with the exploration of Antiquity. In the "static" terms of what was conceived as the "classicistic age," the Renaissance had to appear as a quirky living thing which could not be subsumed by these cool and breezy terms of historical universality. See Jacob Burckhardt, Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien, ed. Horst Günther (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989) 1010-1024.

17. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 251.

18. "Puzzles of the Past," Hortus Vitae, 196.

19. Gunn, 116.

20. It seems that Lee derives her ideal of the free community with Michelet's idea of "le peuple." Different from him, she does link "le peuple" with the homogenous ideal of "la patrie," but rather particularizes his glorified abstraction, reeking of Revolution rhetoric, through her detailed description of the activities of (Tuscan) peasants and craftsmen.

21. Fortnightly Review n.s. 4 (1886) 16-40.

22. Walter Pater, Appreciations (1889; London: Macmillan, 1900), 5-6.

23. J.B. Bullen, "The Historiography of Studies in the History of the Renaissance," Pater in the 1990's, ed. Laurel Brake & Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991) 155-167.

24. Bullen, 165.

25. Michael Riffaterre, Text Production, trans. Terese Lyons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 87.

26. Walter Pater, Greek Studies: A Series of Essays (London: Macmillan, 1895), 100.

27. Euphorion, 133.

28. Pater himself mentions Vernon Lee's essay most favorably in a footnote of his edition of the 1893 text of The Renaissance, 12. "Recently, Aucassin and Nicolette has been edited and translated into English, with much graceful scholarship. . . . The reader should consult also the chapter on "The Outdoor Poetry," in Vernon Lee's most interesting Euphorion; being Studies of the Antique and Medieval in the Renaissance, a work abounding in knowledge and insight on the subjects of which it treats."

29. Belcaro, 71.

30. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 94-95.

31. Baldwin: Being Dialogues on views and aspirations (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1886) 8.

32.I am referring to a passage in Euphorion, "The Outdoor Poetry," 116-17: "There are things about which certain historic epochs are strangely silent; so much, indeed, that the breaking of the silence impresses us almost as the more than human breaking of a spell; and that silence is the result of a grievous wrong, of a moral disease which half closes the eyes of the fancy, or of a moral poison which presents to those sorely aching eyes only a glimmer amid darkness."

33.Lee's half-brother, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, who figured as a kind of father figure for Lee, was rather concerned about her education, although--quite traditionally--he saw its purpose for a social role, not necessarily a career. In a letter of December 1870, which reflects his then typical attitude to his younger sister, a mixture of condescension and admiration, he advised Mrs. Paget on a more disciplined instruction for Violet. "Dear Baby is at present in the possession of extraordinary opportunities. Five years hence her house will necessarily be spent in society, or in preparing for society. At Rome she should be working at Italian by which I mean not only the language but the literature. She should be talking the language daily with persons of cultured taste. The great advantage of lessons is that they introduce regularity and method into one's work. I will not imagine for a moment that Baby would pass her time unprofitably. But how apt is one not to acquire mere smatterings, when one's intellectual powers are engaged on accidental reading." Quoted in Peter Gunn, 47.

34.This implied assumption was all too often expressed in contemporary reviews, which found her style less "endearing" than Pater's and which recommended that she should have read Symonds.

35.Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy, 293.

36.Appendix to Euphorion, 238. For a more detailed discussion of "Symonds's Italy" see Phyllis Grosskurth, The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of J.A. Symonds (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart & Winston: 1964) 236-261.

37.Similary, in Althea: a Second Book of Dialogues on Aspirations and Duties (London: Osgood McIlvain, 1894), her protagonist is "at first, inarticulate, unreasoning, ignorant of all why and wherefore, and requires to be taught many things which others know. But, once having learned the names, so to speak, of her instincts, the premises of her

unconscious arguments, she becomes, as necessarily, the precursor of many of Baldwin's best thoughts, the perfecter of most of them."

38. Walter Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, ed. Donald L. Hill, 1893 ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980), XXiii.

39. As Lee states in Euphorion, she drew much of her material from Michelet. Of the many differences between Lee's and Michelet's concepts, I would just like to point out that Michelet associates "le peuple" with "la patrie," whereas Lee sees the nation as adverse to the people's interests. Moreover, her country people appear happy and self-reliant--altogether rather bucolic--in comparison with Michelet's bitter and dismal peasants, who rather resemble the urban proletariat. For a more detailed analysis of Michelet's "le peuple" see Stephen A. Kippur, Jules Michelet: A Study in Mind and Sensibility (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981) 101-115.

40. Euphorion, 111-166.

41. Lee must have felt that her argument was somewhat daring, for she bolsters it by quoting from "Professor d'Ancona" in one of her sparingly used footnotes.

42. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 67-133.

43. The Handling of words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1923.--In 1893 she also complains to Eugene of having no public. But then--obviously trying to appear "strong" before Eugene--she turns her outsider position into strength. "I don't think it is my obscurity which prevents my being popular, but my habit and determination only to please myself, irrespective of readers. . . At thirty-seven I have no public, but on the other hand, I am singularly far from being played out. . . ." Violet Paget, Letters to Eugene Lee-Hamilton. Vernon Lee Collection, Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, ME.

44. Gunn, 111-112.

45. "Preface," The Renaissance, xxiv.

46. Elizabeth Weed, "Terms of Reference," Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York & London: Routledge, 1989) iv-xxxi.

CHAPTER 3

MISS BROWN: AN AESTHETIC BILDUNGSROMAN?

Vernon Lee between Biography and Aestheticism

When Miss Brown was published in 1884, it provoked a scandal. Friends who recognized themselves in Vernon Lee's roman à clef broke off or avoided contact with her. Critics rejected Miss Brown as an unfair, narrowly moralistic attack on the "fleshly school of poetry." The early commentaries on Lee's first novel, then, have set the tone for most of the later criticism.¹ Henry James's response in a letter to Vernon Lee contains the essence of what critics have found wrong with the novel:

The imperfection of the book seems to me to reside . . . in a certain ferocity. It will probably already have been repeated to you to satiety that you take the aesthetic business too seriously, too tragically, and above all with too great implication of sexual motives . . . You have impregnated all those people too much with the sexual, the basely erotic preoccupation: your hand was too violent, the touch of life is lighter . . . perhaps you have been too much in a moral passion! That has put certain exaggerations, overstatements, *grossissements*, insistences wanting in tact, into your head. Cool first--write afterwards. Morality is hot--but art is icy."²

It seems that with her first novel, Vernon Lee transgressed several boundaries. She violated good taste, literary

standards, and even her own philosophy. The general tenor of the reviews is that Lee lacks distance from her subject matter and that bias and anger have shaped her "nasty" distorted portrayal of the whole aesthetic movement.³ Through the protagonist's puritanical castigations which could have been modelled on Du Maurier's Punch cartoons--Lee assails "the clique-and-shop shoddy aestheticism" of Pre-Raphaelitism, the phony "medieval sort of thing," and most of all, the "moral indifference" of the pretentious "poeticules."⁴ In opposition to her artist-guardian, Anne Brown calls only morally "good" art "beautiful," whereas she finds the kind of aestheticism she associates with Swinburne or Baudelaire "impure," "horrid," or "filthy" because of the artists' obsession with sinful and morbid subjects.

The critics who have scolded Miss Brown's one-sided, overly moral view have invariably identified the protagonist's outspoken moral standpoint with that of Vernon Lee.⁵ They show surprise at Lee's departure from aestheticism and attribute this change of mind to her first visits to London in the early eighties when she personally encountered some of the most prominent proponents of the movement.⁶ If we equate Miss Brown's perspective with that of the author, the novel strangely deviates from Lee's theoretical writings of the same time period, in which she rejects Ruskin's religious-moral approach to art and,

instead, advocates the aesthetic movement's credo of art for its own sake.⁷

To bring some light into the puzzlement over Miss Brown, I suggest we take a closer look at the heroine to find out whether we can read Anne Brown so indisputably as Lee's spokesperson as has been suggested. At the same time, we have to re-evaluate the general reading of her second main character, Walter Hamlin, as the embodiment of what Lee loathed in the vanity, "baseness," and insincerity in aesthetic art. Burdett Gardner rather sees Anne Brown and Walter Hamlin as two sides of a double portrait representative of Vernon Lee's struggle with the rights and wrongs of aestheticism, and he proposes to regard Hamlin as something like Lee's second self. Gardner supports his view from Lee's personal diaries and the correspondence between Vernon Lee and Mabel Robinson (the sister of Lee's close friend Mary), which shows that "Miss Paget . . . while writing Miss Brown (she) had evidently imagined herself in the role of the selfish, cold, vain, trifling and degraded Walter Hamlin."⁸ Similarly, Leonee Ormond has proposed to read Hamlin rather than Anne Brown as Lee's aesthetic mouthpiece at that time. Ormond then suspects that the novel's focal shift from Hamlin to Miss Brown reflects Lee's "violent change during the writing of her novel to her growing knowledge of aesthetic literature and the writers themselves."⁹

It seems to me that the readings which focus on the interrelatedness between Lee's two protagonists can be supported from the novel which presents Anne Brown and Walter Hamlin as adverse but complementary characters. Lee obviously started out Miss Brown as a satire on aestheticism speaking, at first, through the ironic and witty Walter Hamlin. In the course of the novel, however, she seems to have become more and more interested in the development of her female character. Her growing identification with Anne Brown turns the novel progressively into a battleground for Lee's own conflicting and in some respect unsettled emotions and impulses.

In Miss Brown, Lee fuses two different purposes. On the one hand, she explores the moral implications of aesthetic art and literature in a contemporary social context; on the other, she examines the limitations of female roles within a male-defined movement in the form of the bildungsroman. Anne Brown's whole existence and identification revolves around men trying to shape her life. Although she temporarily seems to follow the lead of other women (for instance, Marjory Leigh's school for working-class girls), her points of reference are set by her guardian/suitor Walter Hamlin, her cousin Richard Brown, and to some extent even by her sympathetic Italian employer, Milton Perry. Anne thus forms her goals along the lines of her male models but her

orientation is repeatedly frustrated as she discovers selfishness and vanity behind both Hamlin's and Brown's imagined nobility. The logic for her frustration resides in the discrepancy between her "exceptional nature," i.e. that she is not "made for man but for humankind" and a world, which is built by men for the wishes of men. In this world, Anne has to remain forever discontent as "no man that ever breathed could have satisfied cravings which were in reality not after a man, but after a higher life, a more complete activity, a nobler aim" (MB II: 130).¹⁰

Lee sees the self-centeredness in aestheticism as an intense concentration of male interest and desire. She illustrates this idea in the cartoon-like images of the affectated fashionable London artists who provide a contrasting background to the solid granite morality of Anne Brown. Although an exotic beauty in appearance, her "unwomanly" conduct makes her an alien in these circles. Anne's saintliness contrasts sharply with the aesthetes hankering after lewd morbid pleasures. In this way, Lee produces an efficient image of women's constraint and isolation within the aesthetic male agenda.

Even outside the aesthetic movement her heroine encounters only "ready-made" roles carved out for her by men. She can choose to play decorous or ancillary roles--a work of art, a Madonna, a wife, or a nurse--, but she cannot

create her own role. Her "revolting" decision at the end to become Walter Hamlin's wife although she despises him, then, can be read as her recognition of the impossible existence of a woman who does not identify herself as a "woman," i.e. a creature made by and for men. Anne lacks Hamlin's imaginative power and therefore she cannot think of possibilities for herself beyond her real life experience. She represents what Lee was to formulate later as one of the main problems for feminism, to wit the uncertainty of what women "really" are apart "from women as a creation of men."¹¹ The novel's thematic tensions imply that contemporary social conditions do not provide for the development of female subjectivity and, therefore, women like Anne Brown are kept from venturing beyond "the thing which they expect, with which their soul seems, in some pre-natal condition to have become familiar as the one great certainty" (MB III:276).

By linking the issue of female education and identity with a study of the aesthetical movement, Miss Brown in a way tells Vernon Lee's own story, the story of a "female aesthete." At the same time, Lee follows her own postulate which is to discuss aesthetic questions not in the abstract but in their concrete manifestations.¹² She presents the doctrines and life-styles of aesthetic artists from an unusual angle by choosing a female character from a lower

class and a different country and placing her in the "alien" setting of contemporary London aesthetes. Anne Brown, like Lee, studies "aesthetically right" literature and art, but her foreign morality always keeps her at a certain distance from the scene. By linking her heroine with the "star" of the aesthetic movement, who is in every respect her counterpart, Lee produces a dynamic double. The two figures, at the same time antagonistic and complementary, are arranged in a bipolar ideological pattern, which could be described in such pairs as male-female, upper class-lower class, master-servant, teacher-pupil, artist-moralist--just to name a few. Through the duo of Walter Hamlin and Anne Brown, Lee can study her own, similarly ambivalent role in aestheticism from both inside and outside.

The strategy of doubling characters is not uncommon in Lee, if we think, for example, of her brother-sister double in Ottillie (1883), which exposes the inequality between male and female education and social possibilities. Moreover, the master-pupil relationship between Anne Brown and Walter Hamlin, is another recurring motif which informs many of her double personae, most notably, Baldwin and Althea. Anne Brown's whole existence is so infused with Walter Hamlin's ideas that we may indeed see a symbiotic relationship between their characters. In The Handling of Words, Vernon Lee even claims that the talent of personality "infusion" as

the basic characteristic of good novelists. She distinguishes between analytic novelists, such as George Eliot or Balzac, who merely study their characters, and synthetic novelists, who live all their personages and thus provide multiple perspectives.

The synthetic novelist, the one who does not study his personages, but lives them, is able to shift the point of view with incredible frequency and rapidity. Tolstoi, who in his two great novels really is each of the principal persons turn about. . . .
(The Handling of Words 29)

Although the heroine's story seems to be modelled to some extent on Lee's own life, we should not carry this analogy too far. On the one hand, we may well say that the mentor-pupil relationship between Hamlin and Anne bears a certain resemblance to the way Vernon Lee saw her self under the influence of her male mentors, such as Henry James and especially Walter Pater whom she "reverenced as a master."¹³ As Anne was "borrowing" her education from Hamlin, Lee, as a female writer, was borrowing language from her male peers so that in her early writings she found herself "an adulterated Ruskin, Pater, Michelet, Henry James, or a highly watered-down mixture of these and others."¹⁴ But this equation becomes faulty in other respects. The unstable painter-poet Walter Hamlin, in spite of his telling first name, is not a simulacrum of Walter Pater, for whose writerly discipline Lee had the highest

respect. Lee and Pater had a life-long friendship, and she valued Pater's civil and gentlemanly kindness. Nowhere in her documents do we find the slightest hint of any of the depraved or lascivious traits she depicts in Miss Brown.¹⁵ Walter Hamlin's characteristics--his double talent as painter and poet, his sensuous artistic styles, and his works' titles--rather allude to Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites,¹⁶ of whose artistic intentions Lee was most suspicious. On the whole, however, we should not overestimate these biographical resemblances as Lee usually borrowed traits from the figures of her surroundings to dress up her characters. In this her method was not much different from those of her colleagues, only a little less discreet.

Lee herself discouraged autobiographical readings. Literature to her was to a high degree metaphorical and much too "widened, generalized by the universal experience" to become a "real unveiling" of the writer. Writers project themselves into their style and by this make the readers for the moment perceive the writers' modes of life as their (the readers') own.

Modes of life not as a person, a man with an address and a biography, but as a Writer; that is to say, an individual spontaneous organism, itself subjected to those modalities of art which have been fashioned by the needs of all foregoing mankind.¹⁷

Lee's writerly intentions, her inscription of a female subject position, need to be explored on the textual level in terms of literary traditions, structures, and images. Her consciously chosen pseudonym in itself prompts our research of Vernon Lee (and we must repeat her own words here) "not as a person, with an address and a biography," but as an agent in the tradition of aesthetic construction of cultural identities.

The Female Bildungsroman

Vineta Colby calls Miss Brown "a typical Victorian novel," and her summary of the plot does indeed foreground characteristic features of a literary type common in British and other Western European literatures throughout most of the nineteenth century:

A beautiful but poor heroine rescued from the misery of a servant-life by a well-to-do poet and artist who educates and ultimately marries her. There is a sinister villainess who lures the hero away temporarily and a stalwart rival suitor for the heroine, but the intrigue, having padded out the requisite number of volumes, is evaporated by the inevitable happy ending."¹⁸

It is striking how Miss Brown, when reduced to the mere structural outline, fits so exactly into the generic form of the Victorian romance-plot novel. But the terms are strained. We can only read Miss Brown as a "traditional" Victorian novel if we ignore the heroine's growing self-

awareness, which is next to impossible as she is the "focalizer" (Genette) of her experiences in two of the traditional three volumes.

On the surface, Miss Brown can be read in terms of the traditional bildungsroman: through the "character building" struggle of the subject against an irrational or hostile environment, the protagonist gains maturity through her "will for education."¹⁹ In the end, her striving appears to be reconciled with the exterior laws of society. Anne Brown, the former servant girl, is elevated into the society of aesthetic artists through her *Bildung*. In fulfillment of her earliest aspirations, (and of Walter Hamlin's desire), she has become "worthy" to marry her teacher and guardian. But if we look closer at the heroine's struggle for self-determinacy, we see no connection between her privileged education and her awakening to her own needs, on the one hand, and her resignation to a loveless marriage on the other. Although she is free to pursue her own vaguely imagined ideal of an independent career, she gives up her former plans of becoming a teacher and resigns herself to nurturing an artist on the downslide, fully aware that the best she can do is prevent his further deterioration, as "she could not make him grow better; her position would be as that of a woman who devoted herself to nurse a person sick of an incurable disease. . . ." (MB I: 278).

Thus, for Miss Brown, the final step towards marriage is anything but happy. The heroine's resolution to marry her by now contemptible and weak benefactor, does not seem to be justified from the development of her character. Her decision appears senseless and absurd, and what seems worse, it is a decision made under no material, legal, or social pressure, but an act so-to-speak of a free individual. When, in the last few scenes of this 900-page book, she eventually subjects her life to the laws of narrative convention rather than to the logic of her inner development, the novel's "meaning" is undermined, and the story becomes illogical.

But to deviate from the romance plot, "to change story," in Rachel Blau DuPlessis's terms, "signals a dissent from social norms as well as narrative forms." If events, emotions, or endings are no longer recognizable, the reader is distanced, not only from the expected narrative but also from the learned "patterns of response."²⁰ In this respect, Miss Brown's alleged inconsistency points beyond the text itself, to a literary tradition which Lee subverts even by applying its structures. We may say that she critiques narrative convention and ideology "by writing beyond the ending." To evaluate the implications of this shift in female narrative politics, we need to take a closer look at the literary and ideological history of the

bildungsroman, particularly in its (re)construction of gender roles and identities.

Although from the late eighteenth century onwards women's writing has comprised what can be called "female bildungsroman," the genre was considered as a male domain until well into the twentieth century.²¹ Female criticism has tried to redefine the genre in correlation with the changing social, economic, and political roles of women. Strictly speaking, the term "female bildungsroman" applies only to the twentieth century, "when *Bildung* became a reality for women."²² But such a definition may be too closely modelled on the traditional male bildungsroman (with Goethe's Wilhelm Meister as the archetypal form), which assumes a protagonist who is free to move about and has access to those experiences from which women were traditionally excluded. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bildungsroman, even in its broadest definitions, presupposes a range of social options which simply were not available for women. The female search for self-definition, therefore, had to take a different path. Although women could develop a sense of identity within the familiar determinants of the patriarchal context, they could only do so as "strangers."²³

Traditionally, the genre of the bildungsroman reflects a social process in which the individual is not imbedded in

mythological or "natural" structures of belonging, but develops a mature personality through conflict and struggle. In modern bourgeois ideology it is not sufficient that the standards of society are ingested by the individual. The "free citizen" must recognize the standards of the world as "his" own (Kant). The bildungsroman shows a way for the individual to approach the world without being absorbed by it, on the one hand, and without having to withdraw into interiority on the other.²⁴ The fusion of external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity sublates the conflict between individuality and socialization and creates subjectivity. Such harmonization between external and internal world is demonstrated in Wilhelm Meister's "harmonious objects" (meaning "work") which return to their creator and reduce the distance between producer and object. Goethe's text endorses work that produces not commodities but objects that could be "reappropriated." If all work must lead back to its creator, the end of work is the shaping of the individual. In this respect, the apprenticeship novel, as the bildungsroman is often called, imagines a precapitalistic harmony, which reinforces the links between man and nature, man and society. In such a concept, woman's role is only subsidiary. She can be at best another "harmonious object."

The aesthetic restoration of the autonomous and wholesome individual, became the ideal of bourgeois ideology from the eighteenth century onwards, with *Bildung* as an idealistic mediator. As the outside world appeared increasingly fragmented and irrational, meaning was shifted from the objective to the subjective, from specific activities to a disposition of the soul (Wilhelm Meister). As Lukàcs expresses in The Theory of the Novel, external reality acquires a value according to the "possibility of a personality fulfilling itself in [it]."²⁵ *Bildung* creates a realm where the adverse and deforming forces of society intrude less severely; here everything functions according to the aesthetic standard of "beauty" which is a trope for wholeness, harmony, and perfection.²⁶ The "will for education,"²⁷ i.e. the character-building struggle of the *Bildungsheld* against an irrational environment supplies a model of agency for bourgeois male identity. In Franco Moretti's terms, the novel of education translates the dimensions of Hegel's world-historical subject into the familiarity of everyday existence.²⁸

The aestheticization of "life" into a harmonious whole was promoted by homogeneous social elites, namely aristocratic and bourgeois groups who set their lifestyles as universal standards. When new social groups reached out for education in the nineteenth century, the character of

Bildung was about to change. As the ideal of the harmonious or unified subject was challenged by new social groups on the rise, it became aestheticized. One of its images being *der ästhetische Mensch* [aesthetic (hu)man].²⁹

In the course of the nineteenth century, *Bildung* lost its function as the ideal and exclusive site for the universal (male) subject, and the bildungsroman increasingly featured female protagonists. However, the conventional construction of female identity precluded women's growth through moral struggle. Women were conceived in terms of "being" rather than becoming--"*die schöne Seele hat kein andres Verdienst, als das sie ist*"³⁰--and believed to be incapable of moral development "by nature." Therefore, women were denied any self-determinacy, which meant that man was to become the mediator or perfecter of womanhood. The female *Bildungsheld* did not fit the progressive trajectory of the traditional bildungsroman, and so we find women's educational ends invariably related to and mediated by men and sanctioned by marriage. In *Miss Brown*, the heroine is entirely caught up in this pattern whose heterosexual confinement has no opening for exceptional women "made not for men but for humankind" (*MB*, II: 309). Lee's protagonist, like Goethe's Beautiful Soul, cannot accommodate herself to the roles society offers for women and thus withdraws into an inner isolation. In Goethe's text, the female withdrawal

is compatible with his ideal male subject as the Beautiful Soul only has to provide Wilhelm's "other." Her containment is endorsed by Goethe to uphold his image of humanity. But Walter Hamlin is no Wilhelm Meister and is not the central focus of Lee's novel. If Anne Brown sacrifices her independence for the degenerate Hamlin, she sacrifices it in her function as the text's subject; for a lesser god and for a lesser cause, because love for a man, for her is "a mere secondary concern . . . in the struggle after the ideal" (MB II: 308).

However, female identity independent of the male signifiers seemed unthinkable in the nineteenth century, as many novels of self-discovery exemplify--at least those that made the canon. As object of demonstration for man's aesthetic dream of unity, women's lives (or deaths) in the novel endorse their symbolic and indirectly their social function within a hetero-patriarchal order. The narrative plots of the nineteenth-century female bildungsroman map out the potential contours of women's lives as they could be imagined at the time. While the male hero establishes his identity through a critical engagement with social norms and values, this pattern has to fail for the female counterpart, as her self-realization is always mediated and defined in relation to the male subject and sanctioned by the marriage

plot, which ultimately (dis)places woman into the domestic sphere.

The fate of the female heroine in bourgeois novels, since Pamela or Clarissa, is the "choice" that is determined for her in a male-defined environment: rewarding marriage or redemptive death.³¹ According to Rita Felski the transcendence of the dichotomy of either death or marriage does not come about until the 20th century in the so-called "self-discovery narrative," in which women writers strive to escape the confines of the heterosexual romance plot. Felski links the transformation of narrative form to a wide range of changes for women in their socio-economic status, although she (rightly) warns the reader not to see fiction and social reality in a direct relationship of cause and effect or of reality and representation. However, at the level of the "social imaginary," where cultural meanings are produced and distributed, alternative ways of existence for women became at least thinkable around the turn of the century.

Since the 1970's, literary criticism has tried to redefine the genre. Terms like *Reifungsroman* or *Entwicklungsroman* try to show that the female *bildungsroman* cannot simply be read as another version of the male model, but rather as articulation of a different sense of identity or subjectivity for women as they moved more visibly into

the public sphere.³² But not all critics have been optimistic as regards the success of *Bildung* for women protagonists. Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out that the female bildungsroman is "a story of enclosure and escape" with an "almost unthinkable goal."³³ Similarly, Bonnie Hoover Braendlin observes of the modern bildungsroman that it focuses on "the crisis occasioned by a woman's awakening . . . to the stultification and fragmentation of a personality devoted not to self-fulfillment and awareness, but to a culturally determined, self-sacrificing, and self-effacing existence."³⁴ Female Bildung in the traditional novel has often been described as a form of entrapment, a model for "growing down" rather than "growing up." For the young woman character, it is a tale of compromise and recognition of her limits rather than her possibilities.³⁵ This describes in general the snare in which Vernon Lee's heroine in Miss Brown is caught. Anne Brown's path is discontinuous rather than progressive, and thus resembles Maggie Tulliver's story, which describes a circular movement. Maggie has become lost in the inner landscapes she explored as they have found no exterior actualization in her work or her love.³⁶ Similarly, Anne Brown's return to Hamlin is like a return to the past. Her inner development has found no outside employment while the social forces that she has internalized cripple her freedom.

The happiness, therefore, which she was losing--the independence, the activity, the serenity . . . was only a distant and unsubstantial thing; she had never experienced it, and it could not well be realised. But she knew by experience, familiar with its every detail, the unhappiness which lay in the future as Hamlin's wife, for this future would be but a return to the past; and she felt as might a person lost in a catacomb, and who, having got to a chink, having seen the light and breathed the air, would be condemned to wander again, to rethread for ever the black and choking corridors leading nowhere. (MB III: 277)

Anne's fate reminds us of the story of Eurydice in Gilbert and Gubar's description, who, "abandoned in the labyrinthine caverns of Hades . . . is really (like Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare) the woman poet who never arose from the prison of her 'grave cave.'"³⁷

The ironic discrepancy between woman's self-knowledge and the restrictions of the social narrative is evident in late-nineteenth-century novels, especially in the "New Woman" novels, such as Sara Grand's The Heavenly Twins (1893) or Emma Frances Brooke's A Superfluous Woman (1894), in which the choices available to the female protagonist are increasingly revealed as stifling and repressive.³⁸ We also find alternative plots that do not offer marriage as the only solution for identification to some extent in the New Woman novels, such as Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1883), Mona Caird's The Daughter's of Danaus (1894), or George Egerton's Keynotes stories (1893), just to name a few. Traditional literary history only randomly mentions these "minor" works. It seems odd that these New

Woman novels, like Miss Brown, have drifted out of sight in the twentieth century, particularly as they were widely read by and enjoyed great popularity by the contemporaries as recent studies have shown.³⁹

"Alternative ways" (and we should say, successful alternative ways) for women's self-development were thus already imagined and prefigured in some 19th-century novels. I would include Vernon Lee's Miss Brown as one of those, although the heroine's struggle for self-determinacy raises her only temporarily from her dependencies. However, the novel does explore some of the difficulties that an even apparently independent woman in search for identity has to face in the urban middle-class culture of late-nineteenth-century Britain.

The discrepancies between female education and identity, social and personal goals, are not smoothed over by the plot of Miss Brown. The bourgeois ideal of *Bildung*, i.e. the harmonization of external and internal world, exemplified in the prototype Wilhelm Meister, is undermined by Vernon Lee's bildungsroman which fails to balance thematic tensions and narrative structure while it refuses to offer imaginary solutions for "real" social contradictions. Insofar as narrative constitutes one of the most salient ways of concretizing ideologies in relation to life experience, Miss Brown addresses inherent contradictions of the late

Victorian class structure. By placing an Italian servant girl with strong moral values in the midst of a group of amoral decadent London artists, Lee sharpens the social contradictions by investing the traditional bildungsroman with conflicting class and gender positions.

She also challenges conventional liberal assumptions about a coherent and progressive development of subjectivity and autonomous selfhood. The characters' striving for individual goals is revealed as the result of a "false consciousness," i.e. their tragic unawareness of their ideological determination within an inherently antagonistic society.

Anne Brown's absurd transformation from a poor plain maid servant to a fashionable aesthetic critic exposes the ideological investment of educational ideals. In other words, Lee shows that education is not universally useful or desirable but informed by specific class and gender interests. Anne's "useless" aesthetic training adjusts her to the habitus of Hamlin's artistic London circles, but otherwise alienates her from her own class identity so that "she could not well understand how she came to be where she was." Anne has to recognize the limitations of her aesthetic education as soon as she finds out that it is not useful for her own goals. When she becomes involved with the social reform movement and joins a "club" for educating lower-class

girls, she is scoffed at because she can only offer to teach medieval literature, and she is told that "political economy is what we want the most."

Anne's example shows that the contemporary middle-class promotion of education for the underprivileged--and particularly the newly developing educational possibilities for women--cannot have the assumed liberating effect unless viewed critically in their larger historical context. The seemingly class-transcending value of *Bildung* here appears instrumental for the perpetuation of certain class privileges. Anne Brown's aesthetic education, for instance, is meant to turn her into a lady, which implies that she becomes a social ornament, a reflection of her guardian and would-be husband Walter Hamlin. For her self-discovery, her elitist bourgeois education has only limited value, as it not only alienates her from her own historical background but also from the greater part of society.

To a certain degree she manages to develop critical distance to the aesthetic movement during her work for the social reform movement of Richard Brown. So she rebels in little details against her imposed middle-class existence. For instance, she refuses to take a carriage and walks "through the London streets, in murky spring weather," to readjust herself to what she sees as the legitimate life-style of a working-class woman. "Anne had made it a rule for

the last two or three months to deprive herself of all luxuries. She did not wish to enjoy everything that she had a right to" (MB III: 56). In fact, she is even aware of the incommensurability of her striving for an independent self with the constrained role she would have as an upper-class wife.

Freedom to sympathise and to aspire--to do whatever little she still might to carve herself out a spiritual life of her own, no matter how mean and insignificant. . . . To gain her bread, no matter how harshly; to be of some use, to teach at school or nurse at a hospital; nay, to be able merely to encourage others to do what she might not . . . and this, in her future as the wife of Hamlin, as the queen of this aesthetic world, which seemed to poison and paralyse her soul, was what she knew she could not have. . . . (MB III: 52)

Anne Brown's struggle for self-determinacy thus oscillates between two marks, namely her striving for individual fulfillment and her sense of social responsibility. Her obligation towards Hamlin seems to be informed by a similar kind of responsibility, only between two individuals. Her sense of personal debt and her gratitude towards Hamlin's personal generosity binds her to him although the conditions for this relationship are constituted outside their individual influence, namely by their class position.

Anne's sense of duty and her self-perception as socially inferior repeatedly pulls her back into the past, into a "tragic passiveness," that makes her accept her fate rather than develop a sense of agency.⁴⁰ To Hamlin it is clear from the beginning "that either Anne Brown must bloom

for him and by him, must be his most precious possession and his most precious loan to the world--or that Anne Brown must be simply and deliberately buried under a bushel" (MB, I: 120). Lee exposes Hamlin's seemingly noble motives for educating Miss Brown while granting her full freedom as selfish and possessive. On the one hand, the written contract between Anne Brown and Walter Hamlin leaves her the magic sum of 500 pounds even if she chooses not to marry him, whereas he has bound himself to marry her whenever she wishes it. But in Hamlin's mind, she has to become either "the avowedly most beautiful woman in England" or remain "a sordid nursery governess." His generosity is not guided by sympathy for the plight of the lower class but by his desire to invest an exotic and mysterious Amazon--not by accident a Pre-Raphaelite ideal of female beauty--with his own fantasies so that "Walter Hamlin's life should be crowned by gradually endowing with vitality, and then wooing, awakening the love of this beautiful Galatea whose soul he had moulded. . . ." (MB I: 121). Hamlin plans his courtship of her in every detail, rather in love with his idea of the aesthetic scenario than with the woman chosen to be his bride.

The irony of their relationship is that Anne idealizes her benefactor as she misreads his egoistic motives as

. . . Hamlin's generosity and delicacy of the mind--of the quixotic way in which he had bound himself while

leaving her free--of the chivalrous way in which he had dowered her, making her feel almost as if all this money, which placed her on his own level, was her own inheritance, and not his charity. (MB III: 48)

Spending money on another person without a visible profit for the benefactor can only appear as an unselfish act from her own poor social background. Thus her naïve mind is tortured by self doubts and worries whether she could become "worthy" of him. Hamlin, on the other hand, is "rather pleased that the creature whom he was going to teach how to think and how to feel, did not manifest any particular mode of thinking and feeling of her own" (MB I: 201).

The end of the novel shows that Hamlin calculated right. In a long night of hopeless meditation, Anne Brown decides to marry her benefactor. This decision comes from a "doubled" sense of duty. Not only does she hope to pay back what she feels to be her personal debt towards him, but she also fulfills her social role as a dutiful woman and servant. All the while, her painful decision is based on what we may call ideological deception, in other words, on a perception that puts her in a moral debt for socio-economic conditions beyond her influence. In fact, the generous education that Hamlin made possible for her has put her into a worse servitude than before. *Bildung* has made her conscious of her powerlessness but it fails to help her overcome this state. Precisely because education is not universal but the cultural product of the dominating class

and gender hierarchies, her *Bildung* fails to free her from a moral dependency which contemporary ideology has inscribed in her gender.

Thus we may say that Anne Brown's education cannot have the effect it would have had on a male protagonist. Her subjectivity is caught up in the social construction of the female role, whereas the whole ideal of education--under the pretence of universality--is designed for man's relation to the world. *Bildung* has to fail for the female individual, because her "being" in the world and in history is determined by different premises. Therefore we may read Miss Brown as Vernon Lee's projection of what happens when a nineteenth-century woman is educated as a man, that is, as a subject, although in the ideological frame of the given society she cannot be anything but a woman and an object.

Aestheticism and the Female Voice

The structure of Miss Brown mocks the genre tradition of the bildungsroman as it refuses to offer a solution for the irreducible contradictions between female *Bildung* and male-defined social contract. What possibilities does Lee see for the development of female subjectivity within aesthetic discourses that only signify the male subject? Does her double perspective through the two protagonists, Walter Hamlin and Anne Brown, reflect her own dilemma as a

"female aesthete" and does she therefore construct her intervention into aesthetic discourse in a split voice? Can we read Anne's moral position as an "opening" for a feminist critique of the aesthetic male agenda rather than simply as a close-minded puritan chastisement? These are questions that arise from Vernon Lee's connection of aesthetics and gender in Miss Brown.

Vernon Lee's personal encounter with members of the Aesthetic movement in the early 1880's challenged her theoretical views in Belcaro (1881), which has been considered as the best introduction to her aesthetic philosophy.⁴¹ Especially the three essays "In Umbria," "Ruskinism," and "A Dialogue on Poetic Morality," can be considered as a "declaration" of her aesthetics in the 1880's.

In "Ruskinism" Vernon Lee attacks John Ruskin's privileging of moral-religious principles over artistic concerns. Based on her theory that art and morality belong to separate realms, she pleads for an independent evaluation of aesthetic questions in terms of the contemporary *l'art pour l'art* doctrine. "In Umbria" focuses on the relation between art and artist. Lee "frees" art from religious and moral servitude and subjects it exclusively to the responsibility of the individual. She propagates beauty as art's ruling principle, which can be developed separately

from the artist's moral life. "Beauty" is so-to-speak the primary signifier in visual art. But for the writer, Lee is less permissive. Beauty in poetry, she commends in "A Dialogue of Poetic Morality," can only be achieved through the poet's life-long struggle for purity. Throughout her life, Lee maintained this aesthetic postulate which she saw embodied in Walter Pater with his

insistence on scrupulously disciplined activity, on cleanliness and clearness of thought and feeling, on the harmony attainable only through moderation, [the] intensity attainable only through effort. . . .⁴²

In visual art, Vernon Lee is less strict as she assumes that the faculty for creating physical beauty and the artist's morality are not inherently linked but rather belong to different parts of the human being.

The work is produced by the man, but not by the whole of him; only by that portion which we call the artist; and how much that portion is, what relation it bears to the whole man, we can ascertain by asking ourselves what faculties are required for the production of a work of art. (Belcaro 177)

Aesthetic and moral excellence may correspond to each other (Belcaro 208), but they cannot be linked in a causal chain. Therefore, art does not deteriorate because of a culture's general moral decline (as Ruskin would have it), but dies of its own vital principles, like any living organism.⁴³

Art, if it lives, must grow, and if it grows it must grow old and die. And this fact gradually, though instinctively, beginning to be felt by all thinkers on art, Ruskin, with his theory of moral aesthetics, could never recognize. (Belcaro 217)

If the quality of art were an expression of the prevailing morality, she argues "In Umbria," it seems strange that certain "anomalous times of social dissolution" bring forth "our greatest art" (Belcaro, 173). And not only that: she claims that an artist's corrupt or "impure" personal life may not affect his art in the least, because morality and art engage different human faculties (intellect and sensuality). Her prime example in this argument is Perugino, who, in spite of his cynicism and greediness, produced some of the most gentle and spiritual paintings in the Italian Renaissance.

However, Vernon Lee has to qualify her argument in terms of the Ut pictura poesis debate, by distinguishing clearly between painter and poet, as she sees language--unlike art--informed by both sensual and intellectual sensations. Whereas the visual artist can be reduced to an "optic machine," the poet, "whose works are made up of all that which nature perceives," puts the greatest part of his entire personality in his work.⁴⁴ Poetry, to a much larger extent than painting, becomes a reflection of the artist's own life:

Now, in poetry, one half of beauty and ugliness is purely ethical, and if the poet who deals with this half, the half which comprises human emotion and action, has no sense of right and wrong, he will fail (Belcaro 250)

For Lee the poet's work (which stands for literature at large) bears the highest responsibility in any form of art. She places the writer outside her theory of the two separate realms of art and morality. Whereas the painter can keep his life out of his creations, the work of a morally corrupt poet "cannot be actively pure" (Belcaro 192), because he deals with human passion which she associates more closely with "ugliness," in the contemporary sense of imperfection.

In her last Belcaro essay, "A Dialogue on Poetic Morality," the focus shifts to the artist's responsibility towards the audience, a side that Pater neglected in his aesthetic communiqués.⁴⁵ Here again, the role of the literary artist is described as crucial for the moral manipulation of the audience. Lee tries to alert poets to their extraordinary responsibilities. The imaginative power of literature, she argues, enters the reader's mind and easily settles "fluctuating opinions" beyond the control of consciousness. Particularly in an era of shifting values--as which she sees the late nineteenth century--where people can no longer "tie their boats to religion or social convenances" (Belcaro 255), literature has to be much more aware of itself than in previous centuries, when a unified world picture gave the mind a stable frame. Poets should not use their influential art as an alibi for those sensuous self-indulgent pleasures which society denies the

individual, but rather convey "useless pleasure"--desinterested aesthetics in the Kantian sense. As art enters our minds without the conscious control of reason, it needs to be as remote as possible from what is "most necessary in nature," i.e. our base instincts. She criticises the so-called "mystico-sensual" school (her cynical term for the poetry of Baudelaire or Swinburne) for slipping sexual pleasures into our minds in the disguise of art. Poetry to her is not the meritless expression of what is merely our nature but a life-long struggle for purity. She requires the poet to practise conscious ethics, not in Ruskin's sense of a duty towards God, but as a responsibility towards society.⁴⁶

"A dialogue on Poetic Morality," seems to leave off the aesthetic discussion where Miss Brown starts.⁴⁷ Like Cyril, the poet-painter Walter Hamlin experiences a crisis in his artistic career. Cyril, who represents the modern artist, is troubled by his loss of ideals and his doubts about the importance of art altogether. Hamlin's crisis exemplifies the individual case: he feels paralyzed in his work by a melancholy indifference and is wearied of the contemporary art scene which celebrates him as an idol. Both Cyril and Hamlin are thrown into doubt by their awareness of a "hideous reality," and practise their own version of escapism. Cyril wants to give up art and devote himself to

more practical social issues as he asks himself "what moral right a man has to consume his life writing verses, when there is so much evil to remove. . . ." (Belcaro 232). Hamlin, on the other hand, tries to secure art in an exclusive aesthetic oasis:

The world is getting uglier and uglier outside us; we must out of the materials bequeathed to us by former generations and with the help of our own fancy, build for ourselves a little world within the world, a world of beauty, where we may live with our friends and keep alive whatever small sense of beauty and nobility still remains to us, that it may not get utterly lost, and those who come after us may not be in a wilderness of sordid sights and sordid feelings. (MB I: 274)

He sees his "mission" limited to a "little world of beauty" within hostile surroundings and withdraws into individualistic exclusiveness where he creates for other artists in an elitist circle of "mutual admiration."⁴⁸ Hamlin thus conceives the artist's role as much more limited than, for instance, Baldwin, Cyril's mentor in Belcaro, who believes in the benefit of art for society as a whole. Artists for him are "the professional creators of good--they work not for those immediately around them, but for the world at large" (Belcaro 242-3). According to Baldwin "[literature] can do both much more harm and much more good than it could do before" (Belcaro 271). Artists carry great ethical responsibility, at the center of which lies the creation of beauty to be enjoyed for the sake of happiness.

The "innocent" pleasure in art is its only moral function left, which is to "fend off evil." The destruction of evil, however, is not the artist's profession. As he is "made of infinitely finer stuff than other men," it is his duty not to waste his qualities, but to devote them to artistic creation for the world:

We shall say that, in order to indulge in the moral luxury, the moral amusement, of removing an imperceptible amount of pain, he has defrauded the world of the immense and long-lasting pleasure placed in his charge to give; we shall say that, in order to feel himself a little virtuous, this man has simply acted like a cheat and a thief.
(Belcaro 243)

Hamlin does not regard himself as a "destroyer of evil,"⁴⁹ nor as a creator of good, but simply as a preserver of beauty in a hostile world. Contrary to Baldwin, he finds the role of the artist diminished. His is "not the mission of poets and artists of former days; it is much humbler, sadder, but equally necessary" (MB I: 274). He does not question the value of art, as Lee assumed Ruskin did. Hamlin belongs to a later generation of artists. He is simply bored by the worn-out mannerisms of the aesthetic school and keeps looking for new inspiration, which he expects to find in the "strange beauty" of the Italian servant girl whom he discovers as his "beautiful Galatea" (MB I: 121).

Lee gives Anne Brown a statuesque figure and sombre exotic features to make her appear mysterious and unreal so

that she can become the perfect site for artistic fantasies. She is model and artwork in one as Hamlin paints from her as well as into her. He reads into her a kind of pure spirituality which is to revive his own listlessness. Paradoxically, the education he gives her is to endow her abstract figure with a "soul." But this soul has to remain abstract so that she can be the mirror for Hamlin's fantasy and desire. In fact, he is not even interested in her "real" character; a personality of her own would make her useless.

He wished to see more of her, but to see more only of her superb physical appearance, and of that sullen, silent, almost haughty manner which accompanied it. As to anything there might be, intellectual or moral, behind this beautiful and dramatic creature, he did not care in the least, and would rather have seen nothing of it. So far, she was striking, admirable, picturesque, consistent; further details might have spoilt the effect . . . the man respects the unknown woman as a goddess and respects himself for having discovered her divinity. (MB I: 50-53)

Anne Brown is carved by Hamlin like a statue from the outside according to the Paterian concept of *Allgemeinheit* "to seek the type in the individual, to abstract and express only what is structural and permanent, to purge from the individual all that belongs only to him . . ." ⁵⁰ In the concrete social situation of Lee's novel, *Allgemeinheit* loses its lofty charm and becomes tyrannical. For Hamlin, Anne has to reflect more of her creator than of herself. By construing her as an aesthetic form, he can keep her at a distance and ignore her as a "real" human being. When she is

passionate, he enjoys the intense expression; when she is sullen and sombre, he savours her "tragic beauty." As he conceives her aesthetically, he can read into her whatever he likes and thus keeps up the illusion of deriving from her a new meaning for his art.⁵¹

Hamlin reproduces his aesthetic ideals of womanhood in Anne and ignores her own proper qualities. He abstracts his idea of her purity from her appearance and invests it with his desire for artistic redemption, but as he fails to take notice of her own character, he cannot see that her moral standards are incommensurable with his artistic goals. Both protagonists enter into a conflict, when Anne realizes that Hamlin's poetry aestheticizes "evil" for a sensational effect. Anne somewhat naïvely demands that art represent the good as the beautiful for the edification of the human soul. She rejects his ennobling of vice and immorality as degenerate, whereas Hamlin--echoing Pater's call for the artist's fidelity to experience--defends his position by claiming to represent life truthfully with all its negative aspects the existence of which she would like to ignore: ". . . you, who are pure and upright, who cannot conceive the reality of lust and the fascination of evil--you can never understand the hold which evil has in this world . . . Evil is; it cannot be stamped out" (MB II: 211-212). Hamlin wishes art to reflect the whole variety of experiences and

sensations in life, but he believes that in his generation "there is nothing to nourish art nowadays. . . . Art can't live where life is trivial" (MB I: 273). Hamlin and his aesthetic friends imagine real-life experience to be much reduced in their age, so that they seek novel sensations by dealing with immoral or evil subjects. He finds that they cannot let the limitations of "outdated" moral or religious viewpoints impede this search for novelty, and proclaims that "everything is legitimate for the sake of an artistic effect" (MB II: 94). Hamlin believes to be innovative; but in his anxious attempts to comply with the formulaic aestheticism of his artistic peers, he merely comes across as vain and self-centered. Their petit-bourgeois version of art simply reverses old standards: the beauty of good is replaced by the beauty of evil and, therefore, they practise merely a kind of sectarian snobbishness bordering on stupidity. After reading to his friends from his new works which bear the moral influence of Anne Brown, their comments are contemptuous and arrogant.

I think it's perfectly disgusting," gobbled out Dennistoun, the little rickety poet. . . . "It's not a question of an alteration here or there," he gobbled out; it's the whole tone of the poem which is pestilent. It's Wordsworth pure and simple, that's what it is. (MB II: 75-77)

Hamlin's "loyalty" to the aesthetic standards of an exclusive circle, perverts the idea of artistic

responsibility. So his denial to consider larger social implications in his art is fiercely attacked by Anne Brown whose moral postulate echoes Vernon Lee's argument in Belcaro.

The poet is the artist, remember, who deliberately chooses as material for his art the feelings and actions of man; he is the artist who plays his melodies [on] . . . the human soul, which in its turn feels and acts; he is the artist who, if he blunders, does not merely fatigue a nerve or paralyze for a moment a physical sense, but injures the whole texture of our sympathies and deafens our conscience. (Belcaro 273-74)

When Hamlin defends his new poems against Anne's strictures of immorality, he argues that "such things must be judged from a purely artistic standpoint" (MB II 97). To make her point, Lee turns Hamlin a dogmatic stock figure arguing that artistic liberty must not be impaired by considerations outside the writer's will: "Everyone may write whatever passes through his head . . . as to responsibility, I repudiate such things" (MB III: 33). Nobody can agree to his kind of aestheticism if formulated in such absolute terms. Lee strains her aesthetic "strawman" even further by artificially constructing a context in which the consequences of Hamlin's attitude can be demonstrated. Lee has him write a slanderous letter to the fiancé of Marjory Leigh, which leads to the couple's break-up. This example, which Lee inserts somewhat clumsily into the flow of the narrative, is to exemplify the power of literature "to

settle fluctuating opinions" (Belcaro 250), while it also reveals Hamlin's lack of responsibility hidden under the maxim of poetic license. This conduct exposes the hypocrisy of his liberalism, especially when his real motive (revenge for previous humiliation) is revealed.

Vanity, hypocrisy, and lack of responsibility are the main points of criticism in the aesthetic movement as Lee sees it. In her portrayal, she does not shrink from crass distortions, unfair simplifications, and sweeping generalizations. But she also differentiates. One of the positive characters is Cosmo Chough, "the poet of womanhood," whose genuine admiration for Anne and almost naïve enthusiasm for decadent art lends him human quality. Chough's guileless enjoyment of beauty comes closest to what Vernon Lee calls "useless" or "pure" pleasure, i.e. her version of Kantian disinterestedness. Chough's unselfconsciousness differs from the expressed ennui of the rest of the group. He seems to embody the "innocence" of medieval or Early Renaissance man who is the "child" on Vernon Lee's scale of developmental stages in human consciousness which Lee describes in "The Italy of Elizabethan Dramatists."⁵² She argues that the painters of the early Renaissance, represented evil without knowing it as their terms were different from contemporary ethical standards. "Good" and "evil" existed side by side, but the

people lacked the awareness of it. "The blindness to evil which constitutes the criminality of the Renaissance is so great as to give a certain innocence" (Euphorion, I: 102). "Passionately fond of letters and art" as Lee's Renaissance people, Chough seeks aesthetic sensations without a sense of "evil." Chough's guileless enthusiasms for the movement resembles Anne's first idealistic view of aesthetic art. Like Anne, Chough is a dilettante. He writes poetry in his spare time (he works as a clerk). To heighten the likeability of her character, Lee puts him in charge of a sick wife and several small children. We may wonder, then, how Chough, burdened with such responsibility, can spend so much time with his aesthetic friends discussing the sins of Lucretia Borgia without Lee's moralizing censure. But Chough is forgiven because he is the "child" of the movement. And what is even more important, he lacks the self-centeredness and lecherous masculinity of most other male characters.

In contrast to Chough, Hamlin's retreat to artistic innocence appears artificial and unhistorical, because he cannot go back from his level of self-awareness. He indulges in the fin-de-siècle mood which deplored the modern artist as one who has come too late after everything has been said and done. In fact, Hamlin basks the melancholic yearning for the irreversible and yet tries to project outside himself a somewhat untainted state of mind by setting up Anne Brown as

an image of purity. In fact, it is in the company of both Anne and Chough that Hamlin appears most wholesome.

Whereas Chough can be seen as a version of Hamlin's "better" self, the painter Edmund Lewis represents the "morbid" version of Hamlin's aestheticism. Lewis's does not engage in art as useless pleasure but regards it as a "free ticket" for all kinds of immoral acts otherwise socially unacceptable. He chooses "sinful" subjects in order to shock his audience and savor their reaction. When he gives Anne a copy of Mademoiselle de Maupin (as a gesture of an indecent proposal) he is not interested in her artistic judgement but in the effect the book has on her (MB II: 150). For the same reason Lewis exposes his erotic nude drawings to the vicar's "very young" and innocent daughters slyly watching the effect on them with his "glittering eyes rising like that of a snake" (MB II 144). Hamlin's and Lewis's reactions to the girls' emblematic purity, marks the main difference between the two artists. Whereas Hamlin finds pleasure in painting the two girls to preserve their beautiful impression--"so perfectly fresh, and unsullied"--, Lewis tries to corrupt their purity for his morbid voyeurism.

Lee presents aestheticism at its worst, when Hamlin's "naturalistic" poems, written under Anne's muse, become the target of his friends' ridicule. Their sneering comments of the Max Beerbohm type, sound like petit-bourgeois prattle

rather than aesthetic criticism: "'I think it's perfectly disgusting,' gobbled out Dennistoun. . . . 'And then, I don't know how any man can write a poem about people who are in love and get married.'" Cough's piteous attempt to come to Hamlin's aid, turns the school's aestheticism into a farce. "'Don't you think, now, Hamlin, that you might just alter a little, and make it appear that they weren't married?'" (MB II: 76). Hamlin's friends believe to be aesthetes by just reversing the prevailing ethical code, i.e. by making their utterly bourgeois idea of immorality their highest value. Their criticism of Hamlin's apparent return to conventional art reveals that they are just as impaired by limitations as the convention they attack. Their pseudo-aestheticism is similarly restrictive to artistic freedom as the moral tradition they believe to have left.

In Baldwin's terms we might say that the poets in Miss Brown are not committed to art for its own sake, but "for the sake of an excitement, which the respectabilities of society do not permit their obtaining, except in imaginative form" (Belcaro 247). Anne Brown voices this criticism with much more moral pique when she accuses "these vain, weak, unreal poets and artists" abusing art as an alibi for "selfish enjoyment of beauty and selfish interest in sin" (MB II: 133-34). She sees the whole movement in a cul-de-sac, where they only find their "morbidity introspective"

selves (MB II: 89). Poetry to them is not a "life-long struggle," but a ritualistic exercise in self-satisfaction. Preoccupied with the fulfillment of their own desires they seclude themselves from other contemporary developments and become inflexible and close-minded. Anne here functions as the spokesperson for Vernon Lee's reservations about the art of modernity. Baldwin's warnings (in Belcaro) of the dangers in the so-called new freedom of art, becomes manifest in the social "reality" of Lee's novel: modern aestheticism requires alert and responsible writers; otherwise it will only become self-indulgent, formulaic, and finally degenerate.

Through Richard Brown, Anne's cousin, Lee brings in an element of social criticism of the Aesthetic Movement. Brown, a leading personality in the social reform movement, whose portrait is partly modelled on William Morris,⁵³ sees aestheticism as the hypocritical and mannered expression of the pleasure-hunting leisure class. He satirizes their snobbish eliticism and parasitism and sets his idea of "life" (social action) against their "art" (aesthetic mannerism). Brown's work aims at the improvement of society through the aesthetic and moral education of the lower classes. His seemingly unselfish striving for reform makes him attractive for Anne in her search for idealistic goals after her alienation from aestheticism. Her

disillusionment with the pretentious aesthetic lifestyles of vain and idle middle-class artists has sharpened her awareness of her own limited role in those circles. So she wants to make herself useful for Brown's movement by trying to employ her education for the benefit of the less privileged. She joins Mary and Marjory Leigh in their activism to educate the lower classes. These women's demand for "practical" knowledge, such as social and political economics make Anne Brown's aesthetic education appear vile and even alien to her own class identity. From then on, Anne becomes more conscious of the ethics of her working-class background which she connects with the doctrines of the reform movement to develop her ideal of social usefulness.

Lee makes Anne her spokesperson in her questioning of the validity of art for art's sake in a world of social injustice. During her first visits to England, Lee had become more and more aware of the "ugliness" at the lower end of the social scale. She already expresses these doubts in the last essay of Belcaro, in which the artist Cyril abandons art in order to do something useful for society. In Juvenilia (1887), a sequence to Belcaro, she considers her early aesthetic ambitions as the class-blind and elitist concerns of her "juvenile" stage and propagates a more democratic distribution of cultural goods to all classes. In Miss Brown these social qualms are still very theoretical so

that the overly righteous tone of her heroine is more propagandistic than convincing:

Without exactly knowing what she could do, or even whether she could do anything at all, she felt that she must work--work with all her might; for it seemed as if all the thoughts which the people about her refused to think, all the sympathy which they refused to feel, all the work which they refused to do, and all the sacrifices which they refused to make, must all be taken upon herself--as she alone must bear this terrible weight of rejected responsibilities. (MB III: 219)

But Lee becomes suspicious of her own text, and she has her heroine question her own motives as well as those of the reform movement. With a sharpness that is almost too analytical for Anne's character, which otherwise is "so completely of a piece" (MB II: 57). "Of one piece" is certainly Anne's sweeping judgment of diverse social and cultural groups. Not only does she turn the aesthetic movement into a horde of lewd and affectated snobs, she also turns momentarily the whole reform movement (actually a label for a vast range of social, political, and Christian reformers) into "aesthetes of another sort." It becomes soon obvious that Lee is not primarily interested in a comprehensive portrayal of the contemporary cultural and political scene but rather in the alleged egocentrism of the leading (male) figures. To her, both aesthetes and socialists turn their interests into quasi religions that differ from each other only in their form. Thus, Anne can

Anne take again the side of the aesthetes, to refute Richard's attacks on aestheticism with as much vigor as she herself had criticized the movement.

. . . your religion of science is only another form of selfish aestheticism: your friends hanker after knowledge, as my friends hanker after beautiful pictures, and music, and poetry, and women: and as my people dignify with the name of religion of beauty, so do yours sanctify theirs as the worship of truth. (MB II: 330)

This outpouring is not only the result of her critical reflection but of a crucial encounter between her and Richard which momentarily reveals to Anne the handicaps of her role as a woman. Until then her enthusiasm for the reform movement brought her closer to Richard, and she began to fancy working for the improvement of society by his side. For instance, she developed plans to go to one of the burgeoning women's colleges and thus make her education socially useful. But her dreams are shattered, when she finds out that her ideal of comradeship, which implies working as an equal partner at Richard's side, is not shared by him. Her high-flying ideas are turned into disgust, when she discovers that he has primarily been interested in her sexual identity as a woman.

"Anne," cried Richard, seizing her hand, "I love you--I love you--I want you--I must have you!" It was like the outburst of another nature, a strange, unsuspected ego, bursting out from beneath the philanthropist's cool and self-sacrificing surface. (MB III: 73)

He offers to "free" her from Hamlin's guardianship in order to replace it by his marriage proposal, which under nineteenth century legal conditions for women would put her right back into dependency. Anne realizes that in spite of her self-definition through her work, Richard Brown, in spite of his outspoken respect for her honor has all along pursued her like a possession. Once more Lee's equation of maleness with selfishness and sexual desire seems to be confirmed.

Richard Brown loved her, wanted her; it was the old nauseous story over again; the sympathy, the comradeship, the quiet brotherly and sisterly affection had all been a sham . . . and now the one man who had remained to her as an object of friendship and respect, her cousin Dick, had preached against selfish aestheticism, had talked her into positivistic philanthropy--had conjured her to respect her nobler nature, her soul, her generous instincts--had supplicated her not to degrade herself. . . what for? that he might satisfy his whim of possessing her. (MB III: 76)

Her disappointment in Richard Brown, leads to Anne's momentary apology for aestheticism, but she does not give up her moral stance in cultural critique. Through her female lens, we see magnified what Vernon Lee believed to be serious shortcomings of the Aesthetic movement: the lack of responsibility, the abuse of art for self-indulgence, and the failure to become innovative by understanding aesthetic pleasure only in masculine terms.

However, Anne's monolithic morality, which has to castigate any frivolous aspect of art and prevents her from understanding the value of pure pleasure which Lee herself never denied. Anne, "to whom happiness is a mere name, a negative thing," can conceive the idea of pleasure only in terms of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Life and art have to reflect hardship and moral seriousness to be justified.

She had never hoped, scarcely even wished, for happiness; the semblance of it had passed before her eyes, had, for a brief time, made her life more acutely sensitive; but she returned to the negative: it was the law of her life. (MB III: 193).

Lee speaks of her protagonist's seriousness almost in the same manner in which she rebuked Ruskinian moralism in Belcaro.

All this Ruskin has forgotten: he has made the enjoyment of mere beauty a base pleasure, requiring a moral object to purify it, and in so doing he has destroyed its own purifying power. . . . (227)

Does that mean that we should read Anne Brown's puritan attitude as an expression of Lee's return to a kind of "Ruskinism"? I presume that such direct and absolute referentiality between author and character would unjustly limit the possibilities of literary representation. Here it becomes important that Lee repeatedly emphasizes that Anne's character is "of one piece" only able to look into one direction at a time. Lee here echoes her assumptions about historical perspective in Euphorion, namely that any view is

always qualified by the time and circumstances of the viewer so that there can never be a "thing in itself."

It seems to me that Anne's aesthetic judgment must not be understood as an absolute or an end in itself but rather as a characterization of a woman from the lower classes whose values are formed around virtues which are mocked by her social superiors. The aesthetes' deriding of Anne's aesthetic standards, has larger social implications as it is not only directed against an "ignorant" individual but at the social group she represents. The controversies over art and morality between Walter Hamlin and Anne Brown, then, is not just Vernon Lee's representations of different aesthetic opinions, but rather an attempt to contextualize abstract or theoretical positions in terms of class and gender.

Again, Lee lends a narrative context to a concept she developed in Euphorion, where she demonstrates that "lower-class" culture often adopts the unfashionable or discarded materials from cultural elites. Peasant art, for instance, tends to validate what "high" culture thinks to be hopelessly backwards. In Miss Brown, the aesthetes' snobbish sneering at Anne's old-fashioned "Wordsworthian" taste, then, can be read as a metonymic representation of class difference. It is relevant that Lee has chosen as her heroine an Italian servant girl. In her persona the social question is always present and the aesthetic debates can

never fully take off from its historic ground. At the same time, Lee exposes the aesthetic movement's class-blindness even though they constantly act out social difference in their conformity to an aesthetics whose artificial styles describe the typical remoteness of an elitist group from the socially "inferior."

For a woman from the lower classes, life and art mean servitude, hardship, and moral seriousness; all told, something quite different from the ideals of fashionable London aesthetes. Anne Brown rejects the self-indulgent life-style of the idle classes as degenerate. To her art is a manifestation of high morality, which has a redeemable value and thus cannot be the place for wasteful pleasure or impure desires. She has made Hamlin her ideal, as she sees only his generosity in liberating her from her servant position and putting her into contact with what she believes to be the high ideals of art. This standpoint forbids her to accept any artwork by Hamlin that does not reflect her image of him as a "good" person. When he points out to her that "unfortunately I have much more experience of life and evil than you" (MB II: 213), she refuses to even acknowledge that side of him. Instead, she accuses him of imitating fashionable moods and denies his having felt or thought those "hateful things" his art describes. On the one hand, she is upset at Hamlin writing about things he "should be

ashamed of" (MB II 94), but on the other, she cannot accept his justification of being truthful to his own mind. She refuses to see that the ideal and "good" Hamlin produces such "horrible" thoughts. Anne's attack on Hamlin's inconsistency at the same time reveals the paradox in her own moral postulate: although she demands from him absolute truthfulness in his artistic expression, she cannot ultimately accept this quality because it implies immorality which she must reject.

According to Hamlin, Anne cannot grasp the complex relationship between art, artist, and reality in modern times, because her way of thinking is structured in the simple bipolarities of good and bad, true and false. Lee pushes again and again at this absence of another dimension in Anne which limits her perception. Like a statue, she is made "of one piece" and looks at the world from only one standpoint: "But Anne Brown's nature was too completely homogenous--too completely without the innumerable strata, and abysses, and peaks, and winding ways. . ." (MB II: 18). Therefore, Hamlin's self-conscious, complex perception, which oscillates between imagination and reality must remain unintelligible to her. What she considers "a pose" is to Hamlin the many-layered reality of his mind.

The sort of shimmer, as of the two tints in a shot stuff, of reality and unreality, of genuine and affected feeling, of moods, noticed, treasured up,

reproduced in himself,--which existed in Hamlin, would be perfectly unintelligible to Anne. (MB, II: 57).

Unable to accept the validity of intellectual sensations, Anne demands from literature real-life strategies, which--as the author remarks with a certain irony--may lead to a "ludicrous disproportionateness:"

The poor girl, not understanding how such things [mysterious temptations] will shoot up in the poetic mind as a result of mere reading, and be nurtured there for a day for the sake of their strange colour, would screw up all her might to help him, writing to him to be patient, to be strong and bold, to remember the nobility of his nature . . . (MB I: 224-25)

Anne Brown fails to see the freedom that lies in imaginary intellectual or artistic processes, which, according to Hamlin, enhance and determine the variety of "human" experiences. Her lack of metaphorical thinking confines her perception to the level of the "real" and isolates her from Hamlin's intellectual art whose self-conscious representation of imagined feelings and desires creates a new kind of reality.

But, again, we have to recall that Hamlin and Anne argue from different class and gender positions. Anne Brown's social background--her working-class family and her years as a servant in Italy--limits her intellectual range and makes her reactions to upper-class aestheticism consistent with her character. That does not mean that Lee's lower-class study is always convincing. It seems actually a

little strained, for instance, that a servant with a "simple" character reads Dante in her spare time, which makes us wonder to what extent Lee was able to imagine the life of the working classes. Lee herself may have had some doubts of her portrayal of classes outside her own social experience for, at times, she tries a little too hard to indoctrinate her readers with too many references to the heroine's one-dimensional mind and servant-girl identity. It almost seems that Lee keeps reminding herself of Anne's humble social origin, which is quite different from the author's own cosmopolitan upper-middle-class background.

Lee is more convincing in the presentation of the intellectual conflict between Hamlin and Anne, which shows that they do not speak the same language. As Anne's mind is "of one piece" and schooled by a kind of working-class realism, she lacks intellectual sophistication (if we want to be negative), and shows pragmatic concern for concrete social problems (if we look at her more favorably). Her way of thinking reflects a different existence than Hamlin's melancholic, self-conscious, and egocentric reveries. Both characters are incompatible, divided by their different modes of perception, as Hamlin shows in one of his rare moments of sincerity: "He [Hamlin] was deeply touched . . . because he knew how little she guessed at the self-conscious unreality of so much of him" (MB II: 59). Only as long as

they see each other ideally they seem to be in accord. But as each ideal is just a heightened picture of the "best" self, and not of the other, their symbiosis falls apart when their different "realities" of class and gender intrude. Hamlin's interest in self-fulfillment and Anne's belief in social duty represent irreconcilable sides of 19th-century bourgeois ideology which, at the same time, divided these virtues along class and gender lines. Hamlin, as a male representative of the *Besitzbürgertum* can easily combine the claim for self-fulfillment with an aesthetic hedonism which denies moral responsibility. Anne Brown's sense of identity, on the other hand, which combines "female" values of duty and self-denial reinforced by the work ethos of her servant position, make her look for these moral values in life and art.

Between the two, Vernon Lee does not invariably privilege Anne Brown over Walter Hamlin. The first one-hundred-and-fifty pages of the novel, are written from Hamlin's perspective and show more sympathy with him. But as soon as Anne is leaving her "safe" Italian environment, Lee shifts her point of view to the heroine for the rest of the novel. Her style becomes more heavy-handed when she describes Anne Brown's reactions to the aesthetic world in London from the position of a social and intellectual outsider.

As we have seen, Lee occasionally distances herself from her heroine, whose rigid moralism goes as much against Hamlin's "decadent" character, as it goes against Vernon Lee's own artistic temperament. Although Vernon Lee seems to agree to large portions of Anne's criticism, she shows that the heroine's narrow morality misses the complexity of the scene. As much as Anne's pure and homogenous character brings out the hypocrisy and falsity in aesthetic poses, her sense of propriety is too easily offended. Her puritanism makes Anne a critic but not an authority of aestheticism. Anne's orthodox refusal to accept the representation of "evil" in art, for example, clearly contradicts Vernon Lee's statement in Belcaro:

If we were bound never to write except about good people, there would be an end to half the literature in the world...There could be no human action or interest if literature were to avoid all representation of evil: no more tragedy, at any rate, and no more novels. (252)

Anne Brown's purity undergoes a strange metamorphosis under the pressure of the circumstances. In the melodramatic last book of the novel, when Hamlin's art and personality are considerably weakened because of his indulgence in sensual pleasures--sexual affairs, opium, and alcohol--, she lets him go as her ideal and pursues her own independent goals with a certain selfishness. Despite her consistently moral posture on the outside, she secretly develops an almost vicious way of thinking so that she finds a "morbid"

pleasure in watching Hamlin become the prey in the grip of his cousin, Madame Elaguine. Anne hopes to be set free from Hamlin if he marries his cousin. She has manoeuvred herself into moral dependency through her almost perverse gratefulness to Hamlin's "benevolence" towards her. Although their education contract leaves her the magic sum of 500 pounds a year even if she chooses not to marry him, her moral obligation paralyzes her decision to pursue her own ideal of self-fulfillment.

In the end, Anne Brown's search for an independent identity remains unsuccessful. Both aesthetic movement and reform movement put her at a disadvantage because of her sex, as neither one offers a possibility for female agency. Anne's whole life seems to be determined by men, from Walter Hamlin to Richard Brown, who each create her role according to their own desires. In the aesthetic movement she has to be an erotic and exotic statue, with an aesthetic education that manifests her passivity. Only as long as she cooperates and accepts the role that is written on her body she can "pass" within this social elite.

In the reform movement, her role is similarly passive. She is expected to act as a mere assistant of the male leader, and even then, primarily in her sexual function. As a woman, her professional role is not even considered

although she has exactly the qualifications required to be the reform movement leader's secretary.

"There is the son of one of our head workmen, a very intelligent lad, of whom I am thinking; but perhaps he is not sufficiently educated yet. I must have some one who knows German and French and so forth." Anne felt a lump in her throat. Oh that she had been a man, instead of being this useless, base creature of mere comely looks, a woman, set apart for the contemplation of aesthetes! If she had been a man, and could have helped a man like Richard Brown! (MB III: 63)

Anne Brown ends up in a hopeless and tricky situation. Educated as a lady, she cannot go back to her former servant position, which in turn makes her feel the idleness and uselessness of an upper-class woman's life quite distinctly. Her financial independence through her contract with Hamlin, seems to give her a real chance to pursue her plans to go to Girton and become a teacher. Therefore, the reader is shocked and puzzled, when she finally decides to marry Hamlin, whom she detests by now. This sacrifice seems unnecessary and immoral. It makes no sense, for she knows that even if she becomes his muse once again, "she could prevent his growing worse, she could not make him grow better" (MB I: 274). Her words seem to echo Hamlin's melancholy view of the role of the modern artist in comparison to his forerunners, which is "much humbler, sadder, but equally necessary."

But for Anne Brown as a woman from the lower classes these words have a different meaning. Unlike Hamlin, she

cannot "choose" to be melancholy. Her resignation is the result of an oppression from which not even her *Bildung* could liberate her. Anne's education has followed a somewhat circular path so that at the end of the novel, she is little more than the servant she was at the beginning. Although she is financially independent and has a clear vision of her professional plans, she is not able to use her "capital" because her exaggerated feeling of obligation towards Hamlin compels her to choose unhappiness, the only "reality" known to her. Only if we underestimate the enormous power of Anne's sense of obligation as well as her lack of imagining other realities, does the ending appear absurd.

The story of Miss Brown shows us a portion of female "self-crippling" through the internalization of the moral and social roles which mark female reality in late nineteenth-century England. This form of oppression is not too obvious because it shows little material evidence and rather exists in the sphere of female self-perception and subjectivity. The sense of moral obligation is not part of conscious self-awareness, nor is it part of the contemporary discourse on women's rights; but it is anchored deeply in the unconscious, habitual memory of the body, which proves to be the most inert keeper of cultural values and social hierarchies.

Although Lee's own unsettled emotions decidedly weaken the overall effect of Miss Brown as an art form, the novel represents an almost invisible but powerful aspect of female bondage. There are others in her time who have tried to draw attention to this aspect of women's oppression. Olive Schreiner, for instance, demonstrates in The Story of an African Farm the morally binding effect of the socialization process of Victorian woman as a serious hindrance in their striving for freedom.

The ending of Miss Brown mocks the reader's expectation shaped by the narrative tradition of many Victorian novels of development, namely the heroine's "salvation" in death or marriage. As I pointed out at the beginning, the reading of Miss Brown as a novel with a "happy ending" (Vineta Colby), is only possible in terms of its outward structure. If we look at the futility of the heroine's self-awareness, the novel can be read as a piece of feminist critique--of the lack of social space and independent agency for women and of a whole literary genre that endorses this predicament.

Notes

1. Some criticism of Miss Brown was provoked by Vernon Lee's "shameless" use of her aesthetic friends as models for the characters. The Rossettis, William and Jane Morris, and Oscar Wilde, for instance, were outraged by Lee's impersonations and avoided the contact with her for years. The Rossettis were the most indignant of all. Miss Brown came out when Buchanan's invective against The Fleshly School of Poetry had just been forgotten. Lee's novel rekindled the unfavorable impression of Dante Gabriel Rossetti at a time, when William Michael Rossetti was setting about to create the "great" legend of his late brother.--For a more details, see Leonee Ormond "Vernon Lee As a Critic of Aestheticism in Miss Brown" Colby Library Quarterly IX (3) (September 1970): 131-154.

2. Henry James to "Miss Paget" (Vernon Lee) on May 10th, 1885; quoted in Burdett Gardner, "An Apology for Henry James's 'Tiger-Cat'." PMLA 68 (1953): 688-695. - James was disappointed by Vernon Lee's first novel, but delayed his response as he was in the precarious situation that Vernon Lee had dedicated Miss Brown to him "for good luck". When he finally commented on it, 6 months after its publication date, he carefully mitigated his criticism by calling it, for instance, "very interesting." In the correspondence with his friend Perry (12 December, 1884), his tone was considerably harsher: "But I may whisper in your ear that as it is her first attempt at a novel, so it is to be hoped it may be her last. It is very bad, *strangely* inferior to her other writing, & (to me at least) painfully disagreeable in tone. . . . It is in short a rather deplorable mistake--to be repented of." See Leon Edel, "Henry James and Vernon Lee." PMLA 69 (June 1954): 677-787.

3. Cosmo Monkhouse called it a "nasty" book whose satirization of the falseness of the aesthetic ideal leads to the "grossest immorality." Cosmo Monkhouse, "Miss Brown." Academy 3 January 1885: 6-7

4. Vernon Lee used to speak of the Rossetti clan as "poeticules." William Michael Rossetti and his wife are unmistakably represented in the novel in Mr. and Mrs. Spencer; Dante Gabriel Rossetti's is one of the models for Walter Hamlin. For further identifications of Lee's characters see Richard Cary, "Vernon Lee's Vignettes of Literary Acquaintances," Colby Library Quarterly 9 (3) (September 1970): 179-199.

5. So, for example, Peter Gunn, Vernon Lee, Violet Paget, 1856-1935 (London: Oxford UP, 1964) 101: "Psychologically Miss Brown may be just possible, but the reader does not come to regard her as a possible human type so much as a lay-figure for Vernon Lee to clothe with her own emotional, moral and sociological preoccupations and prejudices." - Similarly, Vineta Colby assumes that Vernon Lee speaks through Miss Brown [and cousin Richard] "preaching her own brand of idealistic socialism." Vineta Colby, "The Puritan Aesthete: Vernon Lee." The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the 19th Century. ed. Vineta Colby (New York: New York UP, 1970) 256.

6. "Her growing knowledge of aesthetic literature, and of the writers themselves, revealed the decadent and erotic strain latent in aestheticism, and it disgusted her." Leonee Ormond, "Vernon Lee as a Critic of Aestheticism in Miss Brown," Colby Library Quarterly, IX, 3 (September 1970): 131-153.

7. "And to this constant moralising, hallowing, nay, purifying of art, are due, as we have seen, the great number of Ruskin's errors..." In "Ruskinism," Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions (London: W. Satchel, 1881) 226.

8. Gardner's quotes Lee's reflections upon the attacks on Miss Brown from her journals in which she scrutinizes her own morbid obsessions. "What if I were, in some matters colour blind, what if I had myself a morbid imagination . . . Am I not mistaking the call of the beast for the call of God; may there not at the bottom of this seemingly scientific, philanthropic, idealizing, decidedly noble looking nature of mine, be something base, dangerous, disgraceful that is cozening me . . . May I be indulging a mere depraved appetite for the loathsome while I fancy that I am studying diseases and probing wounds for the sake of diminishing both?" Gardner, The Lesbian Imagination, 366-77.

9. Ormond, 150-51.

10. This characterization of Anne Brown as a "not-woman" is Lee's most explicit definition of what we may call a lesbian subjectivity. The idea of the generally human (which reminds us of Terry Castle's "worldly" lesbian), defined independently from man, comes up repeatedly in Lee's work, particularly in "The Economic Parasitism of Women" (1902).

11. "The Economic Parasitism of Women," 294.

12. In her introduction to Belcaro, for instance, she states, "I have done as best I could, merely to satisfy my own strong feeling that art questions should always be discussed in the presence of some definite work of art, if art and its productions are not to become mere abstractions, logical counters wherewith to reckon" (8).

13. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 260.

14. "Can Writing Be Taught," The Handling of Words, 296.

15. Although there is a certain physical resemblance between Hamlin and Pater, this should not be overinterpreted. On the whole it seems that Lee just meant to create a refined or effeminate look in her character.

16. The story of the lower-class girl's "discovery" and education has a certain resemblance to Rossetti's relationship with Elizabeth Siddal. This speculation is complicated by the fact that Anne Brown's physical appearance clearly bears the traits of Jane Morris, who was one of Rossetti's favorite models. It seems that Lee has blended different figures from the same milieu to represent "typical" developments or trends within the aesthetic movement.--

The parallels between Miss Brown and Elizabeth Siddal would be worth pursuing in another study. There is a curious incident at the beginning of Miss Brown when the children under her care as a nurse maid bury her books (Dante and an Italian grammar) under some leaves in the garden. Walter Hamlin, who is getting interested in Anne as a model, finds the buried books and "rescues" them. As we know, Dante Gabriel Rossetti had his dead wife exhumed a few years after her death, to get hold of a manuscript of poems which he had buried with her in his first grief (or for dramatic effect?). When he later decided to publish these poems, he committed this unholy act that was handed down to us in gruesome legends.

17. The Handling of Words, 109 - 10.

18. Colby, 255.

19. Georg Lukàcs, Die Theorie des Romans: ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik (Berlin: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1974) 120.

20. Writing Beyond Ending (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 20.

21. For the term "bildungsroman" see Laura Sue Fuderer The Female Bildungsroman in English: an Annotated Bibliography of Criticism (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1990).

22. See, for instance, Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century: Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf (New York: Lang, 1986) 6-7.

23. Mary Bittner Wiseman equates women with "strangers" in her comparison of Socrates' exile from the Athenian world with women's exile from canonical ethics. "Beautiful Exiles," Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective eds. Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) 169-179.

24. The *Künstlerroman*, though, does allow for the protagonists's withdrawal into creativity, which then becomes exteriorized through the work of art. But the solution of art is only open to the male hero and virtually unavailable to the young woman in the nineteenth-century novel. See Marianne Hirsch, "Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm," The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983) 28.

25. Georg Lukàcs, Die Theorie des Romans: ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik (Berlin: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1974) 120.

26. In Wilhelm Meister, the structure of the outside world is invested with "meaning" only through subjective experience, which, in turn, becomes visible as the objective. Therefore the subjective, harmonized, "meaningful" world becomes the "real" world. But the individual's appropriation of the world becomes possible only through imaginary homogenization, which is necessarily idealizing and romanticizing. In the *bildungsroman*, the *Heldenepos* of the bourgeois classes, the hero is no longer the a priori subject, but the common citizen whose story is repeated in innumerable, similar, untold stories. The *bildungsroman* creates a mythicization of individual growth through education and bridges the gap between the "creative" soul of the romantic individual and a profane and common bourgeois subject, which is conceived as male.

27. Lukàcs, 120.

28. Franco Moretti, "The Comfort of Civilization," Representations 12 (1985) 115-39.

29. Gerd Mattenklott, "Der ästhetische Mensch," Funkkolleg Kunst 4 (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1985) 49-83.

30. The beautiful soul's only virtue is that it [she] is. ["soul" in German is feminine; therefore German is more ambiguous in the personal pronoun which refers to soul]. Friedrich Schiller, Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung. 1795-96. München: dtv, 1965-66. Vol. 18 of dtv Gesamtausgabe: Theoretische Schriften 2. 20 Volumes, 36.

31. Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 124.

32. Felski, 137.

33. Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 338 - 39.

34. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, "Alther, Atwood, Ballantyne, and Gray: Secular Salvation in the Contemporary Feminist Bildungsroman." Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 4.1 (1979): 18-22.

35. Annis Pratt and Barbara White, "The Novel of Development." Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) 13-37.

36. Marianne Hirsch, "Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm," 36.

37. Gilbert and Gubar, 99.

38. Felski quotes Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina as "emblematic" not only for the "problematic heroine" in the 19th-century novel, but for the tensions by which bourgeois society is riven.

39. See, for instance, Ann Ardis, New Women, New Novels (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

40. Lee was very much aware of the overdetermination of cultural spaces, especially those carved out for women. In "The Economic Parasitism of Women," she argues that so-called feminine virtues will not disappear even if women

become men's equals. "For, whatever their origin, they have become sufficiently common to both sexes for Buddhism and Christianity to have made chastity, mansuetude and unselfishness the basis of their ethical system, which means that even if women were to become spiritual facsimiles of men, they would still be exhorted to practise these virtues, or else that these virtues (as Nietzsche contends) are by no means so essential as M. Durckheim and other respectable sociologists take for granted" (278).

41. Peter Gunn, 81

42. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 258.

43. Her equation of art with an organism in nature echoes the contemporary adoption of Darwin's concept of evolution for literature and history, as for example in J.A. Symond's approach to art history.

44. Belcaro, 190.

45. Ian Small addresses this aspect in The Aesthetes: a Sourcebook (London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), xxi: "However Pater had cleverly--and presumably quite deliberately--all but avoided a key issue, that of the way in which works of literature are received by the reader. (The topic is in fact briefly alluded to in the last paragraph of his essay 'Style.') Contemporary critics had of course objected--and quite correctly so--that an expressive aesthetic such as Pater (and, later, Wilde and Whistler) had proposed, failed to account for the fact that art also has a public dimension: that is, that art has an audience."

46. In spite of her anti-Ruskinian stance, Lee's call for the writer's control of selfish pleasures echoes Ruskin's argument in the chapter on "Pathetic Fallacy," in Modern Painters. Vol. I. London: George Allen 1903. He demands that the poet be accurate and true to "pure fact" (211) and not be "over-dazzled by emotion" (208). Ruskin and Lee both agree in their plea for the poet's command of his passion; but they differ in the question of purpose: Lee makes a demand for the reader, Ruskin for the sake of truth (and ultimately God).

47. In the introduction to Belcaro, Vernon Lee explains that she closes this book at the moment when her interest takes a different turn, from "the purely aesthetical questions" to "the wider, nobler, far more intricate and dangerous field of ethics" (14).

48. Leonee Ormond, 141.

49. When Anne asks him to engage himself in her reformatory plans for desolate conditions in "his" village, Cold Fremley, he only offers to write a poem about it, but denies his social responsibility. (MB, II: 211)

50. Walter Pater, "Luca Della Robbia," The Renaissance, 51.

51. Even her specific character as a woman is homogenized in a "semivir" phenotype, a term used by Burdett Gardner (566ff) to represent a kind of archetype which he finds in both Walter Pater's and Vernon Lee's writings. This is an interesting aspect when we think of some feminist analyses of the androgyne in aestheticism as a male construction, which absorbs and appropriates the feminine.

52. Euphorion, I: 57-108.

53. Vernon Lee herself was sympathetic to the social philosophies of William Morris. So she excluded him from her critique of the aesthetic movement. See Vineta Colby, 257.

CHAPTER 4

VERNON LEE AND THE FANTASTIC

Although the fantastic short stories are the smallest part of Vernon Lee's work, they are the best known. They have been re-published sporadically in the last forty years mainly in anthologies with other nineteenth-century female writers.¹ Lee's stories, which have the psychological interest of, say, Arthur Machen's "Great God Pan", William Meade Falkner's The Lost Stradivarius, or James's "Turn of the Screw," range between the "uncanny" and the purely "marvelous" on Todorov's scale.² Her stories often create fantastic moments as productions of her protagonists' minds and therefore constitute a kind of psychological reality, where real and imaginary events are not clearly separated. Lee thus exteriorizes and makes visible those feelings and fancies normally hidden from the outside world and even from our own consciousness. Her most prominent fantastic tales, "Amour Dure," "Dionea," and "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," can be read as psychological studies, while their multiple layers of mythological and historical images point

to the larger ideological context. The concrete historical situations of her narrators reflect the late nineteenth-century *Zeitgeist* characterized by a yearning for intensive emotional and sensual experiences. Lee's stories describe a kind of psycho-history as they connect past and present, individual and collective cultural memory in a pathological pattern.

The Genre of the Fantastic

Vernon Lee's supernatural tales appeared around a time, when the "decadent gothic" produced some of the most potent literary myths, such as R.L. Stevenson's Dr Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (1886), Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), and Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897). According to Roger Caillois, the fantastic came into existence at the same time as the idea that the world's order was based on the laws of natural science. Positivistic and realistic modes of representation provided the historical ground for the boom in fantastic literature. The concept of an "objective" world manageable by a rational way of thinking spawned the fantastic as the realm of the "other," the unenlightened, or the irrational, which threatened to become subversive if not contained in a certain form; in other words, the "other" had to be composed into images that could be recognized by "realist" perception.

Nineteenth-century realism presupposes a consensus of a secular, "objective" mode of thought, which dictated a clear distinction between narrative as "history" and narrative as "fiction." In Stephen Prickett's words--"history excluded all but the objective, and poetry excluded all but the subjective."³ Through clearly separated modes of representation the reader can feel in control of the text. This control is shaken in fantastic texts, when the real and the imaginative, the metaphoric and the metonymic are intertwined, and gaps appear.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the fantastic became more and more sophisticated as the traditional gothic polarization of "good" and "evil" became less distinct and "otherness" was more closely related to the self. The external horror of the early narratives was internalized while the reaction of the human psyche to something fearful became the subject of the fantastic text. Henry James's The Turn of the Screw (1898) is a paramount example of the psychological fantastic story, in which the horrible itself remains vague while the text unfolds a representation of the human psyche in a dialogue between self and other.

The *Doppelgänger* motif, a favorite of the nineteenth century, aptly reflects this perception of the psyche. We find the eerie double in Pre-Raphaelite painting (such as Rossetti's How They Met Themselves) as well as in the

literature of aestheticism with Wilde's Dorian Gray or Nerval's "Aurélia" as some of the more prominent examples. The *Doppelgänger*, which is also a recurring motif in Lee's stories, be read as an embodiment of the Freudian uncanny (*das Umheimliche*), which plays a key role in fantastic literature and theory.⁴ The Freudian model, defined as the sentiment produced by the divergence of familiarity and strangeness, in which repressed infantile or primitive fears that have supposedly been surmounted return to haunt us, reads like a basic definition of the fantastic genre itself. Freud draws on fiction as "reality" and thus "turns the text into a paradigmatic illustration of a truth exterior and anterior to it."⁵ If we look at Freud's interpretation of his "master text," Der Sandmann by Hoffmann, the limiting effect of a solely psychoanalytical reading becomes obvious as it imposes an ultimate reading on what Hoffmann deliberately kept indeterminate through a series of doublings in the text.

More recent theories of the fantanstic have either modified the Freudian model or even avoided it, such as Todorov's structural approach. In Todorov's definition, the fantastic as the "hesitation" or "duration of uncertainty" lies between the marvellous and the uncanny.⁶ The marvelous contains improbable or unbelievable affairs which violate the laws of nature. The uncanny, on the other hand, marks

events we can explain by the law of nature but which we find incredible, shocking, disturbing, or unexpected. On the other hand, the fantastic is only fantastic to Todorov as long as we cannot be sure of what we are dealing with, which means that he presupposes an ultimate way of knowing. Vernon Lee's fantastic stories, however, defer any assumptions of knowability through inconsistencies and "gaps" in her narrators accounts, which make us think of Caillois's definition of the fantastic as a break in the recognized order of things or an eruption of the unacceptable in the midst of daily legality, a concept which foregrounds the fear of seeing the rational world destroyed.

Both Freudian and structural approaches to fantastic texts make the recurrence of certain motives appear timeless or eternal. However, the fantastic itself, as we have seen, is a historical category. Therefore, fantastic literature has to be analyzed not only in Freudian or structural terms but also in its historicity. Rosemary Jackson, for instance, approaches the fantastic from a psycho-historical stance in which she explores it as "literature of subversion" in its challenge of dominant philosophical assumptions. She sees subversive possibilities in the fantastic mode because it brings to light the "unsaid and the unseen of culture," that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over, or made absent. The fantastic foregrounds the hidden "by

placing and naming the 'real' through chronological temporal structures and three-dimensional spatial organization."⁷

The majority of definitions of the fantastic have in common the sense of doubt about reality and the projection of fear and desire into images of the "unspeakable" or "unrepresentable."⁸ Based on the theoretical grounds of Todorov, Caillois, and Jackson, we may define the fantastic as a specific form of metaphoric context, which, as the carrier of relations and functions (rather than essences), disrupts the automatized reference to reality. In other words, when the metonymic context of realism is "contaminated" with the metaphoric context of the fantastic,⁹ the ensuing breaks can subvert the signifying process itself.

Fantastic literature, by permitting articulation of taboo subjects which are otherwise silenced, threatens to transgress social norms. That does not mean that all fantastic texts lead to disruption. Thematic transgression--as in the addressing of taboos--can also serve to reinstate the reality principle "to transform its enemies into its own mirror image"¹⁰ or, in Rosemary Jackson's terms, they "frequently serve to reconfirm institutional order, as Gothic fiction often does, by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire and neutralizing an urge towards transgression."¹¹ According to Jackson, the fantastic is

only subversive when it threatens to disrupt the system or the structure of the underlying ideological assumptions by which order is made. Through its move towards non-signification, the fantastic can disrupt dominant signifying practices, such as the construction of the "real" with its nominal unities of time, space, and character. As the fantastic resists closure, it draws attention to the relative nature of these categories, "most particularly of the concept of 'character' and its ideological assumptions, mocking and parodying a blind faith in psychological coherence and in the value of sublimation as a 'civilizing' activity."¹² The subversive potential of the fantastic, then, is to be seen in its attempt to depict a reversal of the subject's cultural formation and to oppose the traditional categories of unitary selves.

Although Jackson's theory of subversion can be employed in our reading of Vernon Lee's stories, it seems problematic that Jackson does not differentiate between male and female subjects. This distinction is crucial for Lee, whose fantastic tales clearly foreground the function of gender and sexual difference in her narrators' desire for identification. Moreover, I suggest that an historical reading of the fantastic also implies the historicity of the author. A female writer of aestheticism like Lee, whose conflicting situation as a woman with an over-invested male

identification on the one hand, and whose lesbian orientation on the other, constituted a complex alternative form of subjectivity. We need to investigate how Lee makes use of the transgressive possibilities of the fantastic to expose and subvert conventional images of gender and particular their invisible connections with cultural, social and psychological notions. As the genre of hesitation, fear, and subversion, the fantastic seems fit to give expression to the marginal, the invisible, the unspeakable, and the unacceptable--notions which characterize the situation of female and in particular lesbian women in the nineteenth century.

I will show that in "Amour Dure" and "Dionea," Lee uses the fantastic to rewrite or undermine the "reality" of male texts. Thereby she decenters the male subject and creates spaces for readings with inverted or alternative primary signifiers which work towards the construction of a different (female) subjectivity. In the order of the fantastic, Lee's female figures turn into subjects. As her texts remains ambiguous and does not reinstate the reality principle, they can effectually subvert the prevailing gender structure.

Vernon Lee's fantastic is not abstract or nameless. In fact, her supernatural women often appear more "real" than her male narrators whose desire for identification is

reflected in the historical and mythological images with which they fashion their female "objects." In "Amour Dure," for instance this correlation is virtually mirrored in an emblematic scene, when the narrator finds his secret "other" uncannily conflated with his conscious self in an almost Dostoievskian act of self-revelation.

I approached, and looking at the frame, looked also, mechanically, into the glass. I gave a great start, and almost shrieked. . . . Behind my own image stood another, a figure close to my shoulder, a face close to mine; and that figure, that face was hers! Medea da Carpi! I turned sharp round . . . On the wall opposite the mirror, just a pace or two behind where I was standing, hung a portrait. (107)

In "Amour Dure" and "Dionea," the mystified female images appear as projections of the narrators' yearnings. The stories have a mimetic effect in that they reproduce the male gaze and the symbolic system that attends it. At the same time, the male perspective, which takes itself as natural, is undermined and mocked by various subtexts. In "Dionea," we almost overlook the narrator's voyeurism as it operates within the given--socially accepted--mode of aesthetic contemplation. We do not at first "suspect" the scholar-narrator as we share his cultural assumptions. But the rationality he professes is contradicted by his train of thought which constantly, albeit unintentionally, reverts to the code of the supernatural. In intricate patterns of *mise-en-abyme*, allusion, and name-dropping, Lee creates a complex

(and often contradictory) psychology which opens new aspects of identity and identification as the signifying system begins to shift.

Lee exposes the cultural forces at work in the construction of conventional gendered perspectives. Her subtexts suggest alternative readings of the mastertext, which resist the self-image of her historicized male narrators. "Amour Dure" and "Dionea" are pertinent examples of Lee's psycho-historical narratives, whose only reality seems to be the fantastic evocations of the narrators' minds made manifest in the fiction of their diaries and letters.

Although visualized in much detail, the female characters--ancient goddess, snake lady, or Renaissance femme fatale--remain enigmatic. In this respect Lee follows her own demands of the genuine fantastic, which must be allusive and suggestive enough for readers to create their own supernatural fantasy (Belcaro 105). The active part that Lee gives to the reader plays a central role in the way her stories work. Her manifold allusions and evocations create meanings on more than one level. On the one hand she provides a narrator, whose rationalization of the world resembles the style of her (implied) readers;¹³ on the other hand, her mythical allusions open a space for us to experience those "terrible but delicious" sensations, which to Lee are the "genuine ghosts," who are

things of the imagination, born there, bred there, sprung from the strange confused heaps, half-rubbish, half-treasure, which lie in our fancy, heaps of half-faded recollections, of fragmentary vivid impressions, litter of multi-coloured tatters, and faded herbs and flowers, whence arises that odour (we all know it), musty and damp, but penetratingly sweet and intoxicatingly heady, which hangs in the air when the ghost has swept through the unopened door. . . .¹⁴

Myth, History, and the Female Text in "Amour Dure":
Vernon Lee Rewrites Walter Pater

In Vernon Lee's story "Amour Dure," an uncanny presence emerges from the text. It is the presence of Medea da Carpi, a woman "dead these threehundred years." Born in 1556--and thus exactly threehundred years before Vernon Lee--she represents the "race of Faustinas, Marzias, Bianca Capellos."¹⁵ The ghost of this Renaissance woman haunts an obsessive 19th-century historian, who has come to the Italian city of Urbania to study its history. But the desire for Medea da Carpi confuses his sense of reality and drives him to madness. At the end, a short newspaper clip abruptly ends the story: "Professor Spiridion Trepka of Posen, in the German Empire, had been discovered dead of a stab in the region of the heart given by an unknown hand."

Read as a supernatural tale, "Amour Dure" is another clever sample of its genre. The story's multiple literary allusions--a favorite Victorian device--not only create the mystery and ambiguity of a good ghost story, but also reveal

the overdetermined character of the cultural text. The curious effect of this story lies in its evocation and simultaneous deconstruction of another subtext. "Amour Dure" can be read as a rewriting of Walter Pater's portrait of "La Gioconda," in The Renaissance, and at the same time as a trope of the entire 19th-century craze for the Italian Renaissance, from Goethe to Swinburne, Browning, and Symonds. But most evidently, Lee's phantom woman Medea da Carpi, who owes a lot to Bronzino's Lucrezia Panciatichi, is a take off of Pater's Mona Lisa, "the presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters." Here, Pater's famous reverie, "what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire" becomes literal history in the legendary Renaissance femme fatale. Medea da Carpi devours her lovers as Mona Lisa devours centuries.

Her lovers . . . all come to an untimely end; and in this there is nothing unjust. The possession of a woman like Medea is a happiness too great for a mortal man...he must be willing to love and suffer and die. This is the meaning of her device--"Amour Dure--Dure Amour." The love of Meda da Carpi cannot fade, but the lover can die; it is a constant and a cruel love. (25)

Medea's sinister and seductive smile means death, not mystified and romantic, but cruel and real. Like her namesake from Colchis she takes revenge and kills her lovers as the mythical Medea killed her children. Both figures symbolize the end to history, at least history as man has known it.

Medea's story, retrieved by the hysteric historian Spiridion Trepka emerges from the pages of his diary kept during his four-month sojourn in Italy. His romantic quest of Italian history mimics both the wistfulness of Pater's imaginary portraits and the 19th-century passion of the Italian Renaissance. For years, Trepka had longed to "come face to face with the Past," and he had "sighed like Goethe in Rome," full of desire for a grand passion, for a woman "for whose pleasures to die."

Trepka's reality is troubled by sexual repression as well by alienation from his national identity. An exile Pole in the new German Empire, he feels oppressed by the rigid intellectual sterility of German historical scholarship, which leaves no room for fantasy and imagination. His romantic ideas about Italy, however, are soon frustrated by the profane reality of Urbania's provincialism and the barrenness of the wintery landscape. Thus he flees into the imagined reality of Medea da Carpi. The hysteric obsession for her becomes most intense around Christmas time and merges with wistful recollections of his childhood in Poland. Feeling that he is "reserved for something wonderful in this world," Trepka wishes and works for the reappearance of the woman from the past. At the same time, he identifies his own subdued revolt against the German authorities with her cunning fight against the sixteenth-century patriarchy

Lee's narrator rebels against dull pedantic historiography by searching for traces of romance in the figure of the Duchess Medea. Her ostracizing through historiography makes her a model for his own state of mind characterized by alienation and repression. Through her image he endows history with soul and spirit and himself with an identity, however, outside society.¹⁶

Trepka's story in a way emulates the character of Pater's portraits of artists, sensitive and more or less isolated characters whose search for beauty or innovation is often thwarted by adverse social forces. These hypersensitive artists loyal only to their impressions appear as the true bearers of the "modern spirit" which can only be recovered by a kindred (aesthetic) temperament, namely Pater himself. Pater's "La Gioconda," the myth of myths,¹⁷ embodies an image of his understanding of the world and its history through the "modern idea." The "strange presence" rises from the waters as the symbol of the timeless moment against the flux of history. Lee takes Pater's time-transcending image of the Mona Lisa--"the fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together then thousand experiences"--and qualifies its universal conception by coloring it with concrete experiences of historical people.

In "Amour Dure" Lee looks behind a myth and investigates its historical production. She examines a

Renaissance woman's life through the historian's mind to discover how his imagination interacts with certain cultural conditions. Lee's tale of Medea da Carpi then backtracks the myth to its making.

At first, Medea's portrait reads like another version of "La Gioconda,"

The face is a perfect oval. . . Tight eyelids and tight lips give a strange refinement, and, at the same time, an air of mystery, a somewhat sinister seductiveness. . . . The mouth . . . looks as if it could bite or suck like a leech . . . A curious, at first rather conventional looking beauty, voluptuous yet cold, which, the more it is contemplated, the more it troubles and haunts the mind. (17-18)

Like the Mona Lisa, Medea epitomizes so-to-speak what men desire, but her history has come to represent rather what they fear. Medea's "sinister seductiveness" which "has led so many men to their deaths," elicits the attraction of this terrible beauty. Between these two poles, fear and desire, (or in Trepka's words "the feeling terrifies me, but it is delicious") the historian pieces together what is remembered of Medea in historical archives and oral traditions. Her image gradually emerges from the historical text, through her letters, and most effectively from pictorial representation. On another level, she is evoked through the people's informal memory in folklore and superstition as in the tale of "Madonna Medea, who rode in the sky on a black he-goat" (35). At the same time, her name conjures up the

antique mythological figure with all its implications of unconditioned love and revenge. She also appears in the dreamlike atmosphere of Trepka's hallucinations which always occur in the deserted church of John the Baptist at a Christmas service. From these encounters, Spiridion retains a rose and a letter which mark her historical transcendence in an almost surrealistic break through time.

The narrative creates an atmosphere of expectation leading up to the climax on Christmas Eve. Spiridion Trepka's narrative repeatedly stages Medea's supernatural appearances during imaginary church services that his mind produces under the impression of the ongoing Christmas festivities in Urbania. The wintery landscape, the smell of incense, and the ceremonious atmosphere created by the bright illuminations make him recall the sensations he felt on Christmas Eve in his childhood, "long ago at Posen and Breslau" (55). In these moments of recollection, just as in the fantastic apparitions of Medea, "all seems a dream; everything vague and unsubstantial . . . as if time had ceased" (55). Spiridion's anxious awaiting of Medea's revelation to him on Christmas Eve parallels his awaiting of the Christ Child as a little boy. The Christian myth, unfolds in the substratum of the text, which speaks of annunciation and the birth of Christ. Medea plots her own rebirth vampire-like, for her return requires Trepka's

death. He is selected for the destruction of the Duke's effigy, a task which he does not survive.

Medea's fatal stroke on Christmas Eve and the fulfillment of Spiridion's desire in the moment of death ironically reverse the traditional conception of Christmas as a feast of birth and new life. The "immaculate" Mother-and-Child myth promoted by the religious discourse of 19th-century¹⁸ is thus evoked and mocked by the unfeminine Medea da Carpi who kills her lovers, and in the subtext by the unmotherly mythological Medea who kills her children. The Renaissance woman appears in the garb of the Compassionate Madonna,--her red dress with the black cloak recalls numberless Renaissance paintings--but the link with her mythical namesake also evokes a pattern of passionate love and revenge.¹⁹ In the classical myth as well as in its many later versions, Medea is the "unfeminine" female or the "unmotherly" mother (a female Kronos), who is a latent threat to the established order. In Greek mythology, the gods approve of her revenge because her motive is Jason's betrayal of her unconditioned love. Euripides makes her the representative of women's oppression and a sign for their desperate revolt.²⁰

In "Amour Dure," the "constant and cruel love" (25) of Medea da Carpi appears eternal and universal, not only through the mythical aura, but also through the symbolism

Trepka discovers in her paintings, which show her wearing a golden necklace with "lozenges at intervals, on which is engraved the posy . . . 'Amour Dure--Dure Amour'" (18). The run-on inscription and the round of the necklace repeating the common Renaissance paradox, "in my beginning is my end," thus reinforce the cyclical movement which is characteristic of mythological time. Medea's pervasiveness on different levels of perception imitates the language of myth, which speaks to the preconscious levels of the mind.

Trepka's historical narrative appears as one among many texts but it highlights the conventional femme-fatale image of this seemingly ruthless woman. Throughout history she has only been visible through her fatal connections with men. And in this respect, Trepka just repeats the traditional narrative. Although he feels superior to other historians as well as to Medea's other lovers his desire does not differ from that of other men in history, i.e. the desire to possess a woman through possessing her text.

In the course of his uncovering, Spiridion Trepka identifies increasingly with Medea whose defense he takes with an obsession bordering on madness. At the same time, his research brings forth a "hidden" text, i.e. Medea's identity as an intelligent and learned woman who can "read Petrarch and Plato," but who is forced to play a merely sexual role for men. Although her quest for wealth and power

is not different from the goals of her male contemporaries, she becomes uncanny and threatening for them because of her sex. Thus she has gone into history as the evil seductress, whereas her greatest rival, Duke Robert, is praised for his rule of clemency. Trepka reveals that either image is false. He exposes the male view from which conventional historiography is written and discovers behind the myth of Duke Robert's clemency the cowardliness of "a cunning, cold, but craven priest," who fears Medea as something "almost supernatural" (26). Trepka's investigation then suggests that the ruler's cruelty--he has her incarcerated and finally strangled by two women--can only be justified by historiography if Medea is invested with evil powers so that the stroke against "La pessima Medea," appears as an act of self defence. As Trepka's historical text deprives the Duke of his "goodness," Medea's alleged evilness becomes relative. At the same time, Lee shows that Medea's image is overdetermined in so many ways that it points to its own cultural construction.

It is Trepka's merit that he rewrites Medea da Carpi's history foregrounding the oppressed and maligned female and simultaneously demasks the euphemisms through which her male rivals have gone into the history books as heroes. However, he remythicalizes her through his sexual obsession combined with his desire for self-aggrandizement. He heightens his

own importance by believing himself to have been "reserved for something wonderful in this world," which is to become her elect lover: "Why should she not return to earth, if she knows that it contains a man who thinks of, desires, only her?" (47) Although he is aware that all her other lovers acted in the same manner, Spiridion feels exceptional because his love makes her immortal: "But she shall love me best--me by whom she has been loved after she has been three hundred years in the grave" (53). The readers recognize the dramatic irony of his almost Oedipal blindness, although Spiridion, it seems, is willing to pay the price for her love: "The love of such a woman is enough. . . . the others died, and I must die" (53). As the hyperbolic cliché (death for a woman's love) is made literal, symbolic and realistic discourse become confused.²¹ Spiridion assumes a "real" position as another rival among figures who exist only on paper. This "ungrammaticality" exposes his ludicrous obsession with the masculine role. He claims to assign Medea a new historical importance, but, unable to think outside the traditional gender images, he gives her first and foremost a sexual identity, symbolized by her open cloak (which reveals her red bodice) and a red rose in her hand. The narrator leaves the traditional patterns of gender relations intact and so they will continue repeating themselves.²² The actual source of dramatic irony then is

not to be found in Spiridion's ignorance of the repetition of fate, but in his blindness to the cultural conditions for his imaging. His "grandiose" insight into the nature of Medea's love--"the love of Medea da Carpi cannot fade, but the lover can die" (25)--is an ironic motto for the self-perpetuating potency of the unreflected content of mythical images.

Trepka is unable to recognize his real motives, in other words, his image of Medea combines his desire for all that is absent in the frustrating reality of the German Empire: the "at-home" feeling of his Polish boyhood, his national and personal identity, and sensual or romantic experiences. The connection between these elements is not made by the text explicitly, but is available to the reader, who recognizes their actualization in the principle "Medea." Although Trepka recovers her from the mythological bind of centuries, he subsequently arrests her image again, this time in the hothouse of his imagination. He temporarily deconstructs the old myth, only to replace it by a new one of his own making which re-establishes "the eternal duration of *La Femme*."²³

Nevertheless, the narrator's dramatic monologue, reminiscent of Browning's "My Last Duchess", shows the reader another text, Medea's text. Trepka's investigation thus gives a voice to woman in history and it is this voice

that resists the historical myth and foils its perpetuation. Unlike Pater's *Mona Lisa*, *Medea da Carpi* does not become timeless as her figure is shown to be the construction of a certain cultural and political reality--the product of a craven Renaissance duke or of a hysterical Polish madman in the nineteenth century.

Vernon Lee transforms the myth of the "eternal" woman by exposig the social and historical coordinates of its making. In the first part of "*Amour Dure*," it seems that Spiridion Trepka can give *Medea da Carpi* an identity that subverts her image in history. From his own alienated position as a subject of the German Empire, he claims to "understand" her. He considers himself the elected re-creator of her life. But as he fails to recognize the historical construction of his desire as well as her otherness, it soon becomes obvious that his fate has to follow that of her former "lovers." Trepka's sense of reality dissolves to the degree that he desires her presence and the historian writes *Medea* into history by the same movements as he is written out of it.

The meaning of desire becomes disturbed when the object itself (*Medea*) begins to desire--not erotic fulfilment, but power. The text works with the "strange presence" of Pater's *Mona Lisa*, but it also shows what happens when women have the power to construct their own images. Lee slips into a

male narrator's voice and constructs a position for a female subject, which was supposed to be an object and manages to produce a voice for woman without putting her back into the traditional historical void. Vernon Lee's story thus designs the possibility for a female position in history while she exposes the (male) discourses that have kept her outside. "Amour Dure" can be read as an inversion of Pater's modern myth. Whereas he designs a picture of the Romantic Fatal Woman, who resolves the antimonies of history, Lee traces the model back into its components. She reverses the mythmaking process and let's us see the mind behind it. Her female figure is just as enigmatic as Pater's. What is different is the interpretation of this enigma. With Ian Fletcher we may say that "Pater was trying to create an image or model, a design, into which he could pour all the female fluid matter of his understanding of the world so as to locate it there and make it legible." Fletcher also translates the phrase "Men in the ways of thousand years" into Pater himself, and he finds the Mona Lisa expressive of what he himself desires. Then "the ways of a thousand years" is an attempt to give universality and authority of the image, which contains a synoptic history of the development of civilization.

All the thoughts and experience of the world have
 etched and moulded here . . . the animalism of Greece,
 the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with

its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias (The Renaissance, 98-99).

And is not Medea da Carpi all this, too? "The return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias," are these not the metaphors of her story? And yet, her image differs from that of the Mona Lisa as it includes the viewer's perspective. "Amour Dure" not only represents the female mythical object but it reveals the relationship between the object and the maker, i.e. the male subject in history.

Whereas Pater's myth gathers history through the heightened sensitivity of the individual artist, whose temperament is mystically linked to the aesthetic writer of the modern age, Lee looks into history from the woman within the myth. Similar to the way her heroine haunts her narrator's life, Lee enters historiography from a female perspective yet shaped by a male view. Through complex arrangements of various cultural images, Lee constructs the visibility of woman in history as well as a point of view from where she can speak as a "subject-I." For this, Lee borrows her male narrator's voice, for instance, in his rebuke of pedantic historiography. But she puts him at an ironical distance when his inflated male ego deludes him into a manic competition with the historical woman's former lovers. As the historian's madness unfolds, Lee reveals the historical construction of his (male) subjectivity and

thereby that of his object. However, his madness creates a potential reality for Medea's voice and allows her to become an agent, even a subject, in history.

In a way Lee reenacts Pater's ambivalence towards the "objective" historical discourses and even qualifies the validity of history altogether by denying that it can yield any recognition unless we ask who is asking the question. In other words, an understanding of history, of the world, has to remain incomplete and distorted as long as it excludes woman's point of view.

Although Lee largely identified with Pater's impressionistic historicism, she wrote into it a different, i.e. a female subjectivity. She could not totally bask in the modern aesthetic spirit because it evolved from a tradition of imagination of male subjectivity. Therefore, she had to step beyond Pater, just as his Mona Lisa enters men's lives from beyond history. Lee is writing with Pater and at the same time against him. She shares Pater's own ambivalence against historicism and its ensuing demand for historical authenticity. In "Amour Dure," she ridicules the pedantic methods of the German historians ("dryasdusts"), whose imperious belief in the fact-producing potency of "objective" scholarship turn history into a dead object for microscopic dissection. Combined with the arrogance of the newly established German Empire, historical science becomes a

powerful instrument of oppression, which silences diverging positions. Lee recognizes such oppressive historical conditions to be conducive for certain minds and temperament to withdraw into an imaginary reality. She is critical, not of Pater's "scrupulously disciplined activity," but of his earlier hedonistic aestheticism, which is too self-indulgent and thus "unhealthful." In her "Valedictory" to Renaissance Fancies and Studies (1895), she admits that she saw these limitations in the early Pater (as opposed to the "mature" Pater in Marius the Epicurean) and other aesthetes of his kind.

For Walter Pater started by being above all a writer, and an aesthete in the very narrow sense of twenty years ago: an aesthete of the school of Mr. Swinburne's Essays. . . . The cultivation of sensations, vivid sensations, no matter whether healthful or unhealthful, was, after all, but a theoretic and probably unconscious disguise for the cultivation of something to be said in a new way, which is the danger of all persons who regard literature as an end, and not a means. . . . And of this Mr. Pater's first and famous book was a very clear proof. (256)

Pater's (male) glance into history implies a yearning for "lost contents" (Ellen Friedman), without being able to name what was lost. Historical consciousness on the verge of modernism therefore appears as a nostalgic desire--so evidently captured in Pater's account of Winckelmann's longing for home--for an experience which came to fill in for the "unpresentable" contents of the old master

narratives.²⁴ Friedman argues that women's texts of the modernist period also expresses this yearning for the unrepresentable, but that their texts often evoke this unrepresentable as the not yet presented. Women do not look into history in the same way as men. Being denied subjectivity and, with it, agency, they think back through different identities. Thus they show "little regret for the no longer presentable," i.e. the old paternal order. The female paradigm for missing contents, therefore, should be read as a look forward, beyond patriarchy, into the unknown, the not yet presentable.

In her works, Lee keeps coming back to an equation of the unknowability of history with the (yet) unknowability of woman. She keeps referring to possibilities of future methods, for lack of which her contemporaries "sometimes throw away noble ore, for lack of skill to separate it from base alloy."²⁵ Therefore we can read Vernon Lee's female aesthetic historicism²⁶ as a rewriting of the texts of her more famous mentors. Lee exposes the cultural construction of historical myths by masquerading as a male historian, whose imagination is conditioned by individual and collective history. The ghost (myth) of the past, personified in a femme fatale, appears as the production of male hysteria and thus suggest a connection between male anxieties and cultural images.

The late nineteenth century produced some of the most lasting mythical images of women, such as Pater's reverie on Leonardo's "la Gioconda." Between painting and text there arose the aesthetic critic's "masterpiece" meant to give universality and authority to the image and at the same time to inscribe in it a moment of freedom, "an exquisite pause in time."²⁷ Ian Fletcher, for instance, describes Pater's Mona Lisa as a kind of "re-mastering" of the Renaissance picture.²⁸

Lee's story, then, reverses Pater's controlling symbolism: The portrait of Medea da Carpi in Lee's story is a (Bronzino) painting come alive--with all the forces that man has put into it. In this respect, we can read Vernon Lee's story "Amour Dure" as a key text for her rethinking of Paterian aesthetic historicism as well as her exploration of the relationship between history and historian, writer and text. By focussing on the absent or suppressed female text, Lee changes history as it has been known. The end of the story leaves her narrator dead and the historical text unwritten. Medea's story is history in reverse: What she was, is, or will be cannot be known--at least not in man's terms.

"Dionea": Male Desire between Christian and Pagan Myths

Christian and pagan images create multiple textual levels in "Dionea," the tale of a shipwrecked waif, picked up on the shores of Porto Venere after a violent storm and placed in the Franciscan Convent of the Stigmata for a Christian education.²⁹ Dionea's story is told in a series of letters written to a wealthy benefactress by the official physician of the convent school, Doctor Allesandro de Rosis. The Doctor finds Dionea beautiful but strange, as he sees her rousing all kinds of unsuitable desire in the community. His letters insinuate that she is in some way connected with Dione, mother of Aphrodite. As he is working on a book about the reappearance of pagan gods, his research may well have inspired this thought.³⁰

In fact, Dionea's identity with the Greek goddess is suggested solely by the doctor's allusions which reflect his yearning for the return of the pagan past. Both the superstitious village people and the religious congregation shrink from the young stranger calling her witch or demon. They lack the Doctor's knowledge of ancient paganism and use the language of Christian religion and superstition to come to terms with the unknown.

From the beginning, the Christian-Pagan dualism of the text creates an underlying tension. However, different from "Amour Dure," where the hidden subtext is acted out (not

told) by the narrator, this story points more openly, sometimes almost heavy-handedly, to the implied myths. The narrator's implied allusions the goddess Venus are almost too obvious and therefore draw our attention to his coercive discourse which constantly marks Dionea's incompatibility with the Christian surroundings as a proof of her pagan origin.

More amusingly than accusingly, de Rosis describes Dionea's "misdemeanour" in the convent, where she aggravates the nuns with the defiance of a young Jane Eyre. When he is summoned to an ecclesiastical council to discipline her for the desecration of the altar, he finds her behavior provocative; and yet, he cannot conceal his sympathy for this "amazing little beauty," and pities her for the perverse punishment "to make the sign of the cross twenty-six times on the bare floor with her tongue." Again, he juxtaposes Christian and Pagan styles, by comparing Dionea's punishment with the mythological episode, "when Dame Venus scratched her hand on the thorn-bush, [and] red roses should sprout up between the fissures of dirty old bricks" (Hauntings 134). Confronted with these images, the reader may wonder, who are the "real" Christians or pagans.

On the other hand, the narrator repeatedly points out Dionea's strange attraction and gives long descriptions of the common people's fear of her uncanniness ("the evil eye")

and alleged magical powers. The villagers' hysteria reveals the incompatibility between the desire for pleasure and a conscience built on guilt and fear of punishment. They welcome Dionea's magical craft when they buy her love potions, but at the same time, they accuse her of all kinds of disruptions in their social life and even let the children throw stones at "the witch."

Doctor de Rosis pretends not to share the villagers' superstitious beliefs and assumes a more aloof position. As an observer he merely reports the "facts" but seems to refrain from any evaluation. On the other hand, the correlation between the inexplicable events and Dionea's magical powers is only established in his narrative. As de Rosis does not deny the superstitious reports nor look for rational solutions, his seemingly "realistic" story actually corroborates a supernatural explanation. For example, de Rosis reports the case of a young man who suddenly falls madly in love and abandons his military career. By mentioning that Dionea has sewn the young man's shirts, de Rosis suggests her uncanny agency. Although he never denies or verifies the local superstitions, the "grammar" of the text arranges the tales of Dionea's supernatural power as another signification (encoding) of her unchristian and therefore pagan identity. De Rosis only sees the pagan "other" in the Dionea's exotic beauty and has no desire to

find out any other identity or functions she might have. He is not interested in Christian religion but in ancient mythology because the latter seems to provide him with a kind of excitement absent in his every-day world. However, paganism is unacceptable in the contemporary belief system and has to be clothed in a scholarly garb so that it can fill a legitimate social space.

In his mythological preoccupation, De Rosis alludes almost too obviously to Dionea's origin from the sea, her beautiful sculptural physique, and her Greek name and language.³¹ His fascination with this "ancient goddess" seems to feign historical interest where other motives play a role--only less socially acceptable. Dionea's erotic attraction to the male world is extraordinarily strong and does not even spare the most devoted churchmen. Those who approach her directly without keeping a "safe" distance, suffer tragic consequences. In this way, Dionea is associated with the type of the cruel and fatal woman, highly characteristic of the period.

In his letters to Dionea's benefactress, the "worldly" narrator jaunts through contemporary art and aesthetics as if he were a member of the fashionable cosmopolitan colony rather than the inhabitant of an austere community with a medieval mindset. He assumes a pseudo-detached viewpoint from which he derives a certain superiority towards the

villagers while he fashions himself as a kind of intermediary between the "pagan" (Dionea) and the Christian part. De Rosis, deals with the events in the community as if they were aesthetic questions. For the villagers, Dionea's uncanniness is reality; for the doctor, a game of the mind without the immediacy of actualization. At times, his discourse seems so remote from his surroundings that it is no longer compatible with his social role. By interspersing his text with aesthetic impressions he arrests the flow of narration for a contemplative break, in which he describes Dionea's beauty in excessive sensuous language.³² In these narrational pauses, De Rosis departs from his role as Dionea's guardian and his language begins to mimic the sensual, evocative idiom of decadent art. In fact, he even praises the loveliness of some bucolic scenarios as worthy subjects for Burne-Jones or Alma Tadema:

Dionea lies stretched out full length in the sun . . .
'tis a lovely sight, a thing fit for one of your
painters, Burne Jones or Tadema, with the myrtle-bushes
all round, the bright, whitewashed convent walls
behind, the white marble chapel steps . . . and the
enamel blue sea through the illex-branches beyond. (131)

The reader is momentarily enraptured by the imagery, but the change of pace also opens an intellectual space for a critical look at the narrator, particularly when his impressionistic inserts appear "out of tune" with its context. For instance, in the description of Dionea's work

as a mason, de Rosis does not dwell very long on the hard and dirty work--quite unusual for a woman--but immediately turns to her physical appearance. He finds it "magnificent to see Dionea, in her short white skirt and tight white bodice, mixing the smoking lime with her beautiful strong arms" (80).

It seems odd that the old and "respectable" village doctor should pay so much attention to his ward's beauty, "dark, lithe, with an odd, ferocious gleam in her eyes, and a still odder smile, tortuous, serpentine, like that of Leonardo da Vinci's women" (72). Dionea's physical presence is "tortuous" for the moralist in him, but the reference to Leonardo puts her into aesthetic distance. She is compared to a work of art and thus becomes an acceptable objectification of an otherwise "unspeakable" desire. The pagan goddess and the female body are both demonized by the religious discourse, visualized in the narrative in a telling scene, when Dionea is sentenced by an ecclesiastical tribunal as she was discovered "seated on the edge of the altar, in the the very place of the Most Holy Sacrament" (72). The Doctor's language, then combines and transforms the pagan and the female into the aesthetic image of "Leonardo da Vinci's women," which seems to transcend the moral law.

However, the Doctor's aesthetics is invested with a certain interestedness which at times reveals an almost voyeuristic indulgence, which is disguised in the description of a bucolic idyll.

They [the pigeons] furl and unfurl their tails and peck with their little sharp movements of their silly sensual heads and a little throb and gurgle in their throats, while Dionea lies stretched out full length in the sun, putting out her lips, which they come to kiss, and uttering strange cooing sounds. . . . (131)

His frequent descriptions of Dionea's mouth as "a tiny snake's curve" not only echoes Pre-Raphaelite imagery but also directs the readers' attention to the biblical origins of the image. Dionea's snake lips synechdotecally represent the Adam and Eve topos with all its connotations of female temptation and sin and simultaneously points to the "man-devouring" femme fatale as a symbol for male desire and guilt. In this framework, the narrator's aesthetic language no longer appears unbiased; the "loaded" history of his images reveals more than just a scholarly or aesthetic interest in Dionea.

De Rosi's aesthetic excursions are readings of himself while he believes to be reading his environment. Paradoxically, he enacts the erotic desire he had meant to displace by aestheticizing it. In intense moments his language, then, is no longer detached but reflects the underlying tension between desire and guilt, which he

displaces in the common people's hysteric reactions to Dionea. "Your seller of love-charms is as cold as ice, as pure as snow," he writes to Lady Evelyn, Dionea's benefactress, and "the priest has crusaded against her, and stones have flown at her as she went by. . . ." (87).

De Rosis's imagined role as the detached observer is constantly undermined by the matters he communicates in his letters, which function almost like the repressed in Freud's essay on negation.³³ With a certain obsessiveness, the narrator keeps coming back to the villagers' superstitious fear of Dionea's "evilness." While his conscious voice is professing his disbelief and his intention to "counteract the sinister reports attaching to our poor little waif" (80), his repeated return to the subject betray his indirect assertion of the supernatural "truth."

Two other examples from the story reveal how the narrator's own text counteracts his self-righteous pose. De Rosis appears shocked when Father Domenico, a model of pure asceticism and spiritual strength, appears to have become a victim of Dionea's seductive powers. But the narrator can barely conceal his own attraction to Dionea, "magnificent, radiant in her beauty, before the rose-hedge." He tries to wipe out this sensual impression with the "poor thin face" of the dead monk, and in the end triumphantly throws the branch of myrtle she hands him back into "that smile like

the twist of a young snake" (79). This scene reflects the inner turmoil of the narrator, which he tries to conceal from Lady Evelyn and more so from himself. His remark that he "felt glad for Father Domenico; his battle was over" (79), supports the impression that temptation bothers him, too.

In another case, "a once patriarchally respectable old man" is hit by lightning with Dionea being "not twenty paces off" (81). The villagers hold her responsible for this incident, but the narrator takes Dionea's side with a Spiridion-like sympathy. Similar to the Polish professor in "Amour Dure," De Rosis assumes the stance of the jealous rival. The reader, expecting compassion for the deceased (as in Father Domenico's case), is surprised by the doctor's compassion for "poor Dionea" and contempt for the "vile old creature." This time, Dionea's alleged supernatural power seems only right and proper to him as she had warned the old man that "heaven would send him an accident" (82) if he did not leave her alone.

The text thus exposes a certain hypocrisy in the narrator's tone. His interest for Dionea's "pagan" past is fuelled by a yearning for excitement which he finds in the combination of pagan past and present, incarnated by the exotic Dionea. As befits the rationalization of a scholar, the doctor attributes the different sides of his "loves"

(the carnal and the spiritual) to the two incompatible systems--Christian and pagan--with Venus and St. Francis as their symbolic signs. But his attempt to aestheticize his interests reveals a gendered language which directs the origins of his imaging back into the social and cultural conditions. His male desires are configured and informed by gendered images and pop up in mytho-poetic intertexts whose semantic field reveals the cultural construction of the narrator's text.

Fantastic Possibilities and Gendered Spaces

Lee's supernatural touches upon her readers' sensual imagination on the one hand and their cultural knowledge on the other. Her multiple allusions--often beyond the consciousness of the text--create intertexts (paragrams), in which different identities of her female characters can be imagined. For instance, in "Amour Dure," Medea's presence is exclusively constructed from Trepka's mythological and historical allusions, sometimes in seemingly unimportant asides. The other characters, then, each contribute a partial aspect of Medea's image. Trepka's landlord thinks that she is a real woman the Pole fancies, his fellow scholars discuss her as a fictional figure, "historically and psychologically improbable," and the children fear her as a witch. In the end, the images become so densely

intermeshed with the narrator's reality that we are almost relieved when the whole musty atmosphere evaporates with Trepka's death and Medea's triumphant resurrection.

The overdetermination of Medea da Carpi's identity is produced in the gendered spaces in the text which interact with other cultural determinants. Within this intricate pattern, the reader's conscious and unconscious associations become a crucial variable, which can alter the text with every new reading. Medea seems to have as many identities as the reader makes from the substrata of the text. These identities are only gradually unfolded. We are not told that Medea can be associated with the Madonna whose vision is evoked through the metonymic and structural elements and even more so through the conspicuous absence of the Christian emblem. Absence and presence, conscious and unconscious, then, conjure up multifaceted visions between text and reader.

As our imagination widens, the narrator's perception of Medea becomes narrower. What depth in the woman's history he initially opened up is finally reduced to the sexual aspect. This reverse movement makes us aware of the cultural production of images at the same time as we mimic this process in our reading of the text. We are able to realize that the space that Medea da Carpi occupies is entirely determined by the men who have written her history. In this

space, her fateful strokes, which always occur in "fulfillment" of a promise to her lover, becomes a disruptive and policing force at the same time. Medea is a threat in the borderland of the fantastic where she becomes an agent who strives to secure her own territory. In history she loses her ground, but then she rises from the dead, not because the "afterlife" is different, but because it is the same. Medea's nineteenth-century and Renaissance identities are linked by her recurring construction as an object of erotic male desire.

In "Dionea," the pattern of sameness, is made manifest in the place. The same geographical location holds distinct historical (pagan and Christian) traditions revolving around the idea of love. Lee's chronotopic imagination conflates Venus temple and St. Franciscan convent and so identifies different belief systems as phenotypes of a continuous cultural tradition. Again, what is believed--or constructed--to be different turns out to be identical.

Lee's texts expose the cultural organization of spaces where different constituents, such as gender, history, and ideology intersect and create identities. At the same time, her stories highlight patterns of sameness and doubling, provide a different "key" (point of reference) which undercuts the heterosexual, binary syntagm. Sameness and doubling have also been foregrounded by lesbian feminist

theories which have explored textual/sexual spaces that substitute or undermine conventional heterosexual narrative patterns. Marilyn Farwell, for instance, investigates lesbian openings in the basically heterosexual plot of The Mists of Avalon. Farwell adapts De Lauretis's concept of lesbian space, which implies that "characters do not determine spaces but spaces characters."³⁴ Gender difference does not reside in the essential identities of characters but in the narrative spaces they occupy. De Lauretis (and Farwell) apply a non-essentialist concept of gender which foregrounds gendered performance and which depends on syntagmatic interaction rather than on assumed inherent qualities. Farwell illustrates her view by the example of Rosalind in As You Like It, who in spite of her cross-dressing remains an occupant of male space and thus reinforces the master narrative.

For a lesbian reading or a reading against the heterosexual grain, it is important to find out how a narrative constructs different spaces even within a system of gendered dichotomies. We need to ask, for instance, how mind/body, presence/absence, active/passive are ultimately linked with the male/female dualism of gender as well as with the structure in which they occur. All these divisions are heterosexual. They work on the symbolic level which creates ideological structures. Heterosexual narrative plots

are informed by and reinforce the phallogocentric signifying system. Lesbian space, then, means that the heterosexual paradigm is undercut by a change in the primary signifying system. From a "lesbian" position, i.e. a position outside and yet dependent on the predominant signifying system, new symbolic connections can be imagined. A regrouping of patterns (for instance, patterns of difference and sameness), can expose the ideological blind spots of cultural processes.

The fantastic can become a pertinent site for such regroupings as it suspends traditional assumptions about reality. Fantastic moments are vertiginous as they make "old" dualisms shift in the merging of real and imaginary spaces. For instance, the descriptions of Trepka's hallucinations in "Amour Dure" combine separate discourses momentarily. The imagined simultaneity of symbolic and realistic levels reveals relationships which have to remain invisible in a linear discourse that can only show one aspect at a time. In this respect, Lee's textual strategy mimics pictorial representation which conflate events otherwise separated by temporal sequence. This technique, combined with the frantic movement of Trepka's narrative creates the multi-faceted impression of a mind whose madness is not the result of a whim of "nature" but of the way the

gendered idiom organizes cultural informants under certain historical conditions.

Trepka's growing obsession with a woman reveals that the construction of sex and gender is one of the most salient forces in the formation of subjectivity as a function of the larger cultural and historical context. For instance, Medea's political career follows consistently a Renaissance male pattern. Her ruthless and conniving schemes are not different from the Macchiavellian strategies of her male rivals. However, as a woman she also occupies a different social space. These two spheres collide in the moment she desires power, that is, when she wants the same and yet something different as her "lovers." This collision creates a conflict which is temporarily resolved within the image of the femme fatale who incarnates men's fear of the so-called phallic woman.

Medea da Carpi's fantastic return to the world is not by accident staged in the late nineteenth century, a time when women's presence in public life was growing. On the one hand, she represents the threat of female power in her forecful entrance into the established male order. On the other hand, her wandering soul circumscribes a different space outside traditional history, and in this function she becomes a trope for her (and women's) unwritten history. Medea's rebirth symbolizes new possibilities for women,

which cannot be conceived in narrator's (male) discourse and thus have to remain fantastic.

In "Dionea," Lee decks out the (re)birth place of the female with pagan, Christian, and folkloristic images. Here the woman's appearance is not confined to one individual, but it affects a whole cultural collective. Dionea's persona has a wide countercultural impact as she is from the beginning described in opposition to the social context in which she grows up. For instance, she refuses the Christian rituals as vehemently as she rejects the role of the devoted domestic female and instead, shares her life with the creatures of nature in her primitive hut by the sea. Her unconventional behavior and her disobedience of authorities is interpreted as inherently evil by the superstitious villagers. This belief is fuelled by the local gossip which attributes all kinds of uncanny occurrences to her agency. During her childhood in the convent, her disrespect for religious fetishes is sadistically punished by the "good" nuns. In instances like this, good and evil become blurred, and the text directs us to the construction of binary opposites as expression of institutionalized power.

Christian and pagan images are shown as overlapping in the imagined space of Dionea's identity. Her natural sympathy with animals and particularly her "entourage" of white doves synechdotically suggest her identification with

both Aphrodite and St. Francis--a pagan and a Christian saint. Through this symbolic equation, two different cultural concepts are conflated in order to qualify each other. Who is Dionea? Is she a reincarnation of the Greek goddess of love as the narrator would have it, or is her female physique a disguise for her St. Franciscan (male) spirit? Here the genderedness of cultural images becomes important: one is tempted to ask whether the villagers (and the narrator) would recognize her as an embodiment of St. Francis if she were a man. But neither the learned de Rosis nor the superstitious country folk seem to have any particular knowledge of the San Franciscan tradition outside its name.

The loss of the memory of collective history is an important factor in the construction of meaning--or rather its undermining--in the story. This memory loss is one of the reasons why the different pasts (Aphrodite and St. Francis) cannot be connected and why the present (Dionea) remains enigmatic. Although Dionea grows up in the order of the Stigmata, neither the members of the order nor the village inhabitants recognize her Franciscan attributes. Otherwise they might have realized that Dionea's love of all creatures brings her closer to the preaching of the holy man than his hypocritical epigones of the convent of the Stigmata. But the past is no longer part of the present and

so the pigeons are just "dirty animals," as the convent's religion now consists in keeping the place in order--literally and figuratively speaking. The symbolic pigeons in the legend of St. Francis and the real pigeons of the Umbrian village inhabit different realms which cannot be connected in the contemporary cultural situation.

This split is reinforced by the division of gender. Dionea's mesmerizing beauty not only prevents any association of her with the spirit of St. Francis, but it is also incompatible with the female domesticity promoted by the social order of the nineteenth-century community. It is obvious from the beginning that Dionea has no skills for any kind of domestic work, which makes the narrator worry that she might not find a husband. In a way, Dionea shares the fate of Heine's "Die Götter im Exil."³⁵ Like those displaced deities, she is put to work in a system whose signifying idiom restricts her existence. Gods can only be a gods if language creates spaces for them. As alien cultural elements they have to be disguised or assigned borrowed space. In this process which precludes unified or essential identification, meaning or knowledge can only be relative and temporary.

In "Dionea," different social and symbolic spaces inform the reality of a woman who can only be defined through the available signifiers for sameness and otherness.

As she refuses to be a nun she must be a witch. All obviously undesirable happenings in the community are attributed to her un-Christian power. How this power is construed varies from case to case. For de Rosis it is paganism, for the members of the convent it is demonic temptation, and for the village people it is witchcraft. In the demonization of Dionea the text reveals two basic traits in the prevailing system of "making sense." On the one hand the narrative pulls towards generalization; it shows the attempts to subsume Dionea's diverse traits under one totalizing system. On the other hand, the generalizations constitute her difference in various identities. She is different from the village women, from the convent girls, from the traditional Christian community, and from the Gertrude, the visiting sculptor's wife who looks like a "Memling Madonna." The two female figures--Gertrude's, diaphanous incorporeality and Dionea's pagan carnality--present the most poignant contrasting images in the text. At the same time, both stand out from the social setting as they are ideal projections of the narrator's polarized mode of thinking.

The juxtaposition of these two women at the end of the story shows that they both fill different spaces of their gender: Dionea, the strange, exotic, independent, strong, and erotic "goddess" and Gertrude, the domestic, fragile,

and pale wife, the "Madonna," mother of two and pregnant with a third child. Gertrude's interest in Dionea's modelling is almost greater than that of her husband, who speaks with Schopenhauerian contempt of women as the "unaesthetic sex," unworthy for sculpture. It is Gertrud who encourages the seemingly reluctant Waldemar to sculpt the young Venus and who thus becomes more of a temptress than her "pagan" counterpart. Dionea, on the other hand, models for Waldemar with the same kind of indifference she displays towards the lecherous men throughout the story. But what may have led to a bonding of the two women, ends in a Dionysian tragedy.

The gruesome climax of the story presents Gertrude lying across an antique altar in a pool of blood and Waldemar dead below the cliff. Nobody knows what happened. Dionea has disappeared but her departure is staged in the same enigmatic way as her arrival. Rumour has it that she was seen on a strange Greek boat, "singing words in an unknown tongue, the white pigeons circling around her."

How are we supposed to read the ending? The narrator's "meaningful" juxtaposition of the two women as the sculptor's pagan and Christian muses manipulates us to believe in the ritualistic murder of Gertrude with Dionea as the instigator. There is no evidence in the final murder mystery and any traces only lead back into the narrator's

text of rumor and allusion which has set us up to believe in the reappearance of the pagan goddess.

The overwrought symbolism of Christian and pagan archetypes, of ritual and sacrifice rather gives us an impression of mockery and persiflage of the "Vénus de L'Ille"-type stories which titillated Victorian minds with their suggestive uncertainty. On another note, we may even say that Lee here responds to the mindset of those late-nineteenth-century Victorians who (like the narrator) had come to associate their own liberal self-image with pagan models, which were nevertheless still the images of Christian patriarchs.

Vernon Lee was very determined to keep Dionea's ultimate identity in the dark, and it is this unresolved question of her person--reincarnated Greek goddess, homeless waif, or unrecognized St. Francis--which directs our attention to those who wish to control her representation. Dionea's demonstrative passivity and indifference, makes us look for the causes of the uncanny occurrences rather in her tormentors or "benefactors." The text enacts a kind of collective cultural hysteria in which all (even the old scholar) participate in their way. Superstition, rigid social codes, and suppression of carnal pleasure, make this society susceptible to Dionea's "power," which lies less in her actual deeds than in the quixotic interpretations of her

unconventional appearance and conduct. Her body is a constant reminder to villagers, priests, and narrator of their unspeakable desires.

The mediterranean society orchestrates its fears and repression of desire in medieval or even prehistorical terms. Their belief in magic and supernatural powers reveals their lack of self-awareness as well as their unanalytical modes of creating meaning. Through the homogeneization of disturbing or incomprehensible aspects in an uncanny "other," diverse features are suppressed. However, through the juxtaposition of learned with superstitious discourses, we recognize the construction of the "other" as the phantom of the (familiar) systems of belief blown out of proportion.

De Rosis imposes on a "real" woman the assumptions of his mythological research; but underneath his story--as in "Amour Dure"--we get a glimpse of the image of a different woman working hard to make a living for herself in the profane occupation of a stone mason (which is uninteresting for the narrator) and a mixer of love philters (on which he elaborates in detail). Readers who are sensitized to recognizing unconventional female autonomy, can read between the lines and find a female rebel who does not accept the moral and religious traditions and who leads a lifestyle that would fill a man's space in those days.

Male Hysteria and Phallic Women

Lee's narrative emulation of neurotic symptoms has inspired several psychological readings of her fantastic stories. Gunnar Schmidt, for instance, analyzes Lee's texts as representations of the emotional conflicts that lead to hysterical or neurotic behavior. Presupposing an inner coherence among all her fantastic tales, he designs a typology of literary hysteria, an approach which--based on Freud and Lacan--foregrounds the fantastic as the mimetic expression of psychological and more particular pathological symptoms. This procedure is not without problems. Schmidt applies Freudian categories too directly without the necessary qualification that Freud derived many of his categories from literary models. Following Freud's reading of the fantastic as a representation of the rupture in the emotional and cognitive reality of the "patient," Schmidt sees in Lee's stories metonymic representations of continuously suppressed desires that lead to hysteric states of mind. He analyzes her stories as complex psychological "cases," in which works of art function as so-called "situational imperatives" (*Situationsimperative*) that evoke past suppression and thus become provocateurs of fears and desires.³⁶

We may agree with Schmidt that Lee's stories represent obsessive or hysterical behavior, but we cannot accept his

gender blindness. Schmidt computes almost positivistically textual symptoms without questioning the phallogocentric character of his interpretative system. It seems that he is trapped by his basically ahistorical approach, which puts the psychological model like a scientific grid over the text as an "object" of study. Schmidt reads texts separated from gender, biographical and historical context. He sees female hysteria as an empirical fact in nineteenth-century women without pointing out the ideological construction of hysteria in what was assumed to be female nature.³⁷

Schmidt's approach seems to be symptomatic for those types of literary analyses which follow given categories--here, Freudian psychoanalysis--without questioning their function in the cultural context in which they occur. The field of investigation will then only correspond to those results which have already been defined by the frame, premise, or basic assumptions of the interpretative model. Moreover, an unreflected deployment of gender-biased concepts, such as that of hysteria, is bound to reproduce the oppressive cultural structures which constructed it.

Schmidt's psychological reading has not remained undisputed. Peter G. Christensen, for instance, has pointed to the missing "feminist and historical elements." Yet he does not convincingly analyze how male and female images interact in the text. His feminist reading, then, is still

thoroughly male-centered. Although he is aware of Lee's investigation of historical identity through gender images, his discussion of those images is too general and comes close to reproducing clichés as he does not address their ideological construction or interaction with social reality. In his evaluation of "Amour Dure," he uses gender uncritically and so he neglects Lee's construction of a woman through multiple identities which resist the concept of coherent personality and that of an ultimate gender referentiality. Moreover, for a feminist reading it is not enough to state that the narrator's self is divided into male and female without qualifying these general terms. By ignoring Lee's exposure of male subjectivity in historical discourse, Christensen fails to recognize her deconstruction of the very premises of this discourse, such as notions of "identity" and "universality."

Modern readings of Lee's supernatural stories need to investigate how she subverts assumptions about reality as a single-viewed entity and explore the role of gender in the configuration of subjectivities. For example, it cannot be ignored that, contrary to convention, Lee invests almost all of her male narrators with hysteric or paranoid traits, whereas the female figures are mostly serene or indifferent. Locating an allegedly female characteristic in a male frame

of mind (and body) cannot fail to affect the dichotomy of gender images and the hierarchies they constitute.

Let us return to Lee's narrators who are our mediators for the images of the female. I have shown that Doctor de Rosis and Spiridion Trepka both are driven by a certain obsessiveness, which develops into hysteria or paranoia. What does it mean that Lee explores this "female disease" in a male figure? Can she depict the hysteric male convincingly so that the traditional image of the disturbance is undermined? Do we get a better understanding of the function of pathologies when they are removed from their traditional (female) embodiment? To shed more light on these questions, it may be useful to investigate how hysteria figured in the dominant discourses of the nineteenth century.

Before hysteria became "scientifically" mandated, it was already a feminine attribute in artistic representation. A nervous agitation accompanied by signs of physical frailness was often turned into images of "unearthly" women in romantic or gothic literature, such as in Fouqué, Coleridge or Keats. In the course of the nineteenth century, these images became less and less "natural" while they were invested with morbid, evil, or deathbringing qualities. The pale beauties of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Swinburne, and Rossetti promoted the mystical image of attractive but mad or diseased women. The aestheticization of the mad woman

helped to veil the real conditions for exceptional or unconventional women who despaired of an oppressive situation. (One only needs to think of the tragic case of Camille Claudel, the gifted artist and lover of Rodin, who was locked up in a lunatic asylum for decades.)

When oversensitivity became a virtue of the late-nineteenth-century concept of the aesthetic (male) artist, female traits were appropriated by a masculine field without letting actual women participate. The "residue" of this image of neurosis, i.e. the mere disease, was left to woman, whereas the creative part was elevated into the self-fashioning of the male artist. This development was facilitated by earlier concepts of human nature (from Rousseau to Darwin), which granted men the necessary control, intellectual strength, and inventive genius to use their temperament creatively.

Nineteenth-century medical discourse defined women as biologically unstable. They were seen as more prone to insanity, because their reproductive system interfered with their mental control.³⁸ Thus the female character was seen as dominated by an emotional and intuitive nature and, not considered fit to check neurotic impulses.³⁹

For the male artist of the late-nineteenth century aesthetic movement, ecstatic suffering and hypernervousness were often seen as the path to mystic revelation and

heightened creativity. The visionary experience of an elevated or intense psychological state was supposed to reveal ultimate truths. This assumption found expression, for instance, in Pater's "Conclusion" to the Renaissance, or in Arthur Symonds's article on the Decadent movement or his legendary biography of Ernest Dowson. Genius, oversensitive temperament, and mental illness were thus closely related with the figure of the artist. It was assumed that the extraordinary mind did not possess "ordinary intellectual health;"⁴⁰ genius demanded abnormality.

Recent feminist studies have investigated the cultural function of hysteria and madness in the late nineteenth century. Patricia Mathews, for instance, has shown that the propagation of hysteria as a characteristic feature of female nature, veiled the contemporary lack of women's control of their cultural situation. Male artists could cross the boundary between madness and genius without impediment because of their alleged natural intellectual capacity, whereas women were easily trapped by the underlying assumptions about the nature of their sex.

Vernon Lee repeatedly shows us neurotic and overly excitable characters. In Miss Brown she gives a comprehensive "case study" of hysteria in Mme. Elaguine, the Russian-born cousin of the artist Walter Hamlin, who suffers from paroxysms of anxiety or hallucination. These neurotic

states interact with her aura as a mysterious "evil" woman, an impression which is eagerly upheld by the most decadent poets of the artistic circles. However, confronted with Miss Brown's cool rationalization of Mme. Elaguine's symptoms of hysteria, the artists' stance is made ridiculous and appears as a projection of their own lewd and morbid desires. The representation of hysteria as a medical case appears as the more progressive model for the female condition in Lee's time. She deconstructs one male image of woman by another, i.e. she transposes woman from myth into science which, ironically, was just about to become another myth.

In "Amour Dure" Lee returns to the study of hysteria-- this time altering the determinants crucially: she separates the symptoms of hysteria from woman and places them in a man's body. This defamiliarizing move challenges the assumption the ingenious character of hysteria and sheds new light on the gendered construction of the "disease." The story makes several suggestions for a reading of the symptoms as compensation of cultural oppression. We learn, for instance, that the main character is troubled by repression and alienation as well as by his search for identity. Historical scholarship leaves no room for romanticism, which he seeks to find in his love for Italy. Disappointed by the profane reality of Urbania's present, he escapes into the historical "reality" of the powerful

Renaissance woman. We are never quite sure whether he identifies more with her phallic power or her female sexuality--in any case both traits seem to be endowed with erotic attraction for the emasculated Trepka.

By linking Trepka's mental derangement with the femme fatale image of Medea da Carpi, Lee shows different functions of female images. Trepka as a Pole under German rule acts out the part of the "diseased" female character: weak, impressionable and neurotic. Trepka as Medea (out of German control) becomes incoherent and dangerous. On his nightly outings, when he encounters first his phantom woman, and later the ghosts of her former lovers, we find him him virtually "outside" himself, i.e. in a manic state of obsession which culminates in a violent act of vandalism. However, when we read that he was found dead, stabbed "by an unknown" hand, we are ready to assume Medea's agency behind the scenario. Trepka's text simulates the workings of the larger cultural (con)text. Early in the story, Trepka refers to his own madness (it runs in the family), but he distracts us from it by implying more and more frequently that the phantom woman is the medium of his fantastic hallucinations which finally become his reality. Trepka's Rider-Haggard-style obsequiousness to Medea ("I must obey Her") signifies the surrender of his responsibility to the "evil" woman.⁴¹ We are inclined to ask whether he invokes the chimera as a

cover-up for his manic state. In the end, Trepka has shown us that there is no male hysteria as long as there is a woman to take the blame.

Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady

Whereas "Amour Dure" and "Dionea" lean more towards the uncanny, "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" may be called "marvellous"--on Todorov's scale--as it gives the reader a sense of reality similar to a fairy tale. The story, although told in the third person, assumes the Prince's inexperienced and childlike perspective devoid of the knowledge of good and evil, a decisive quality which distinguishes Alberic from the narrators of the other stories. We may say that the point of view in "Amour Dure" and "Dionea" presents a secular and "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" a mythical culture. In Rosemary Jackson's words, the fantastic produced from within a religious or magical mode of thinking depicts the possibility of union of self and other; but when it emerges from a secularized culture, it expresses a longing for unity in the realm of the imaginary. In this sense, the fantastic is inherently idealistic.⁴² On the axis of binaries, the secular revolves around masculine principles, whereas the mythical can be ascribed to what is considered the feminine. In "Amour Dure" and "Dionea," the viewpoint of the "master"

narrative represents the secular order, while the the female figures disrupt this order from an allusive magical-mythical subtext.

This relationship is almost reversed in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," where the text foregrounds Prince Alberic's loving bond with his godmother against the "alien" patriarchal order of his grandfather, Duke Balthasar Maria of Luna. The relationship between the effeminate Prince ("at once manly and delicate") and the Snake Lady begins in Alberic's early years of childhood when he grows up culturally and socially isolated in the Duke's Red Palace where everything is unnatural and stiffly baroque. Live animals are banned from the grounds which is sad for the young Prince, who is longing for a pet. All he learns about nature and animals, he finds in the tapestry in his room. The picture represents his ancestor Prince Alberic the Blond with the Snake Lady Oriana. The latter becomes his worshipped ideal, his friend and companion, during these lonely years of childhood. Alberic is fascinated by the woman's beauty and rich ornamented dress. Only her upper body is visible whereas the lower part is hidden behind an iron crucifix which is too heavy for him to move. When he is a little older and the furniture in his room is rearranged, Alberic discovers that her lower half is not dressed in a skirt but ends in a snake tail, but he loves her "only the

more because she ended off in the long twisting body of a snake (31)."⁴³

When the Duke has the tapestry replaced by one which represents Susannah and the Elders--almost the epitomy of the voyeuristic male lusting after the female body --the Prince slashes it into pieces. He is subsequently exiled from the Red Palace and sent to the remote Castle of the Sparkling Waters, a ruined palace with a lush wild garden whose only residents are a peasant family. The Prince feels lonely in this new surroundings until he befriends a green grass snake which he encounters near a sepulchre with strange decorations.

The innocent and guileless Prince feels sorry for the cold creature and puts it in his pocket to keep it warm. This scene not only has strong erotic undertones but it also intimates the benign nature of the snake, similar to its conception in old Eastern or Sumeric religions. The Prince touches the snake without any fear or suspicion. Its body becomes a source of sensual pleasure for him, pure joy without a sense of guilt or punishment. At the same time, a beautiful lady appears at the Castle of the Sparkling Waters and presents herself as his godmother. She visits him an hour every day "before dusk," plays with him and teaches him a variety of skills.

From a pedlar the Prince learns the full story of the Snake Lady which goes that the Fairy Oriana must remain bewitched as his two ancestors failed to remain faithful to her for ten years. The Prince recognizes his "fate" and decides to take it upon himself to rescue the lady, a procedure which requires that he kisses the snake. He follows the text of the historical legend and puts his lips on the ice-cold creature's head, which makes him swoon. But then he wakes up with his head on the knees of his beautiful godmother who from now on takes care of him.

Although the cultural knowledge associates the snake image with sin and evil, Lee's readers are led to accept the snake as a loving and loveable creature. The positive connotation of the snake undermines the biblical symbolism with its malignant connotations. Through the new signification, any connections the story makes between the snake and the Lady are positively determined. These connections create a point of reference ("primary signifier") for the Prince as he does not have any previous (phallogocentric) knowledge of snakes. The Prince's nightly encounter with the snake in the enchanted garden, gives us an exemplary illustration of the different space the Snake Lady provides. When the Prince "put out his hand and she twisted round his arm, extending slowly her chilly coil to his wrist and fingers," snake and arm are intertwined and

become a synechdotical representation of an *unio mystica*. This image reveals the story's move towards suspension of difference between subject and object, I and other. The oneness of human figures and nature is embodied in a sensual tableau vivant of pleasure, love, and beauty, which creates an imaginary space which does not thrive on difference but holds an area of "fluid exchange."⁴⁴

The identity between snake and Lady is suggested by the Prince's observation that they never turn up at the same time, and the legend has it that the snake body is the enchantment of Oriana, Alberic's beloved godmother. The snake and the lady are separated in the erotic (not necessarily sexual) snake and the nurturing motherly lady, and then again put together in one image as in the tapestry which represents her at the side of Alberic's ancestor.⁴⁵ This overlapping of difference and sameness emulates visibly the cultural processes at work through images and myths. The beneficial character of both images, snake and lady, suggest a doubling of positive values rather than a dichotomy of "good" and "bad." We are not dealing with a Mr. Jeckyll and Dr Hyde identity but with complementary sameness.

From this different signifying set derives a new epistemic system, which is characterized by the absence of phallic power and the symbolic systems which this power controls. Rivalry, bribe, corruption and hunger for power--

attributes of the old Duke's patriarchal system--are absent in this edenic space, so aptly represented in the eutopos of the dense sensual atmosphere of the garden by the Castle of the Sparkling Waters. In this Paradise without the Adam, the Prince receives a refined chivalric education whose main ingredient is love. The Snake Lady provides young Alberic with love, sensual appeal and well-rounded education--altogether things which the Dukes Baroque Macchiavellianism does not allow for. Symbolically, these two different realms are separated by the two gardens: the Duke dominates the Rococo garden of the lifeless "Red Palace," where the most horrible artifacts are twelve granite Caesar busts and a sublime grotto. The Snake Lady, however, resides in the lush natural garden of the ruined "Castle of the Sparkling Waters."

The absence of the phallus in the Snake Lady's system is not conceived as a lack by the Prince, as he still acquires all the skills and the possessions which his social status demands. Through her training, he becomes "every inch of him a Prince" (45). At the same time, Alberic's appearance is clearly distinguished from the baroque masquerade of "the ever young and handsome" Duke Balthasar Maria. This Prince with his "long hair . . . which seemed to imply almost a woman's care and coquetry" displays an almost natural femininity in the delicacy and grace of his

gestures. These characteristics are outward signs of a gentle and benevolent ruling style, exemplified in his kindness towards the local peasants.

The beautiful edenic harmony is disturbed when the three Ducal ambassadors (the Jester, the Jesuite, and the Dwarf) try to put their influence on the Prince through flatteries and gifts. Alberic is immune to their bribes because his godmother has supplied all he needs and thus made him independent from his patriarchal grandfather. The Prince refuses to comply with his grandfather's arrangement for a marriage of convenience in order to resolve the financial difficulties of the ducal court. In fact, Alberic shows no interest in any of the women his grandfather presents to him and keeps praising his snake over the alleged virtues of "the fair sex." As the friendly union between the snake and the Prince inspires fear and hate in the masculine order of the Duke, he has the snake killed when he suspects the "evil" influence of the creature on the disobedient Prince. When the symbiosis of the two is disturbed, the Prince dies within a short time. At the end, rumor has it that instead of a dead snake, a naked lady was found, disfigured and mutilated by sabre cuts.

The cut-up body brings to mind the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, in which--different from Lee's story--Osiris's body is pieced together again by Isis, an image

which Monique Wittig uses in her reconstruction of the lesbian lover in The Lesbian Body. Wittig's cutting up and reassembly of the body as the same and yet something different, enacts the lesbian symbolic system. This system is characterized by the interchange of bodies as non-solid, open entities, which are not marked by difference and boundaries but by openings for constant and creative exchange. Lee's re-evaluation of the snake-woman symbolism in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" can be read as a change in primary reference points on the pre-verbal level of mythological images, i.e. that level of speech which escapes cognitive awareness and therefore has a powerful grip on our culture. Like Wittig, Lee here subverts western mythology, based on patterns of heterosexuality and male domination by absenting the primary signifier of the phallus. The figures of the Snake Lady and the Prince do not reproduce gendered dualism and difference but rather establish fluctuating boundaries between male and female, subject and object. When the boundaries of gender are confused, heterosexuality is undercut and new spaces emerge. From these points in a narration, we can construct a lesbian subtext (or subtexts) which may undermine the master text and its attached heterosexual principles. Such a conversion is exemplified in the Prince's and the Lady's bonding, which threatens the Duke's patriarchal authority.

Like in Irigaray's or Wittig's conception of female subjectivity, "I" is neither one nor two, but "j/e," which draws attention to a split identity, whose two parts yet belong to the same. The Prince and the Snake Lady form a similar double in an autonomous entity that supplies its own needs out of itself and whose parts are vitally important to each other. The Prince cannot survive when his symbiotic other half is killed. Lee's expectations for the possibilities of a lesbian existence here seems to be less optimistic than Wittig's assertive poem. On the other hand, her story has no hopeful ending for patriarchy either as the Duke survives the Prince only a few months and "the House of Luna" becomes extinct.

In "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," a different "primary presence" (Adrienne Rich) is forged through the Snake Lady and the allusions to the mythical stories revolving around her. We may recall that the Melusines or Undines of the folk sagas are creatures of the elements whose flesh is not compact. They have no soul and what is most important: they are not created by Adam.⁴⁶ This aspect makes image of the snake woman a most apt site for the "not-woman" (in Wittig's sense), i.e. the lesbian, whose identity is not defined through her relationship to man. Therefore, the story of "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"

opens symbolic space for the construction of a female identity outside the male signifier.

All three of Lee's fantastic stories mentioned above can be read as modifying or alternative models to the traditional male signifying system. In "Amour Dure" and "Dionea," the narrators' attempts to determine the enigmatic character of the female figure through different mythical projections remain unsuccessful and the text suggests that women are ultimately "unknowable." At the same time, the mythical allusions create clues for subtexts from where the master narrative, i.e. the male text, is undermined or deconstructed. "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady," constitutes the female element as a reality and point of reference in the realm of the "marvelous"--not the uncanny--in the main narrative. The woman in the text is neither dangerous nor destructive nor unknowable, but loving, culture-building, and familiar--at least to those who read her in her own language. The threat here comes from the phallic order of the Duke; vanity, violence, and the striving for absolute control appear as the forces which destroy humanity and culture metonymically represented in the extinction of the House of Luna after Alberic's and the Duke's death. On the other hand, the female realm of the Snake Lady embodies a life-giving, culturally stimulating system.

The Snake Lady resembles what Terry Castle--in reference to Edward Said's notion of "worldliness" calls the "worldly" lesbian of the twentieth century, who no longer haunts some marginal corner of the world but who seeks to inhabit "the large, many-windowed house of culture as a whole":⁴⁷

In the case of the apparitional lesbian, twentieth-century lesbian writers have been able for the most part to ignore the negative backdrop against which she has traditionally (de)materialized. By calling her back to passionate, imbricated life--by invoking her both as a lover and beloved--they have succeeded in transforming her from a negating to an affirming presence.⁴⁸

Notes

1. The following is a survey of the retrievable re-versions of her stories written in the 1880's and 90's: "The Snake Lady and Other Stories" (New York: Grove Press, 1954). Other collections contain these late-nineteenth-century stories or stories written at the beginning of the 20th century: Pope Jancynth and Other Fantastic Tales (London: Peter Owen, 1956); Hauntings: Fantastic Stories (Freeport: Books of the Library Press, 1971) and (London: Heinemann, 1978); For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories (New York: Arno Press, 1976); A Vernon Lee Anthology with Explanatory Notice by Vernon Lee, ed. by Irene Cooper Willis (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1977); Supernatural Tales: Excursions into Fantasy, with an introduction by Irene Cooper Willis (London: Peter Owen, 1987). Individual stories have also appeared in various anthologies of ghost stories or supernatural tales, as for example "The Phantom Lover," in Five Victorian Ghost Stories, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1971). The most recent edition of Vernon Lee's ghost stories appeared in Germany: Vernon Lee, Amour Dure - Unheimliche Erzählungen. Du Mont's Bibliothek des Phantastischen. Mit einem Nachwort von Frank Rainer Scheck. (Koeln: Du Mont, 1990).

2. Tsvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973) 44.

3. Stephen Prickett, Victorian Fantasy (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979) 15.

4. For a more detailed analysis see Jose B. Monleon, A Specter is Haunting Europe. A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 11.

5. Sarah Kofmann, Freud and Fiction. Transl. Sarah Wykes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) [orig. 1974], 159.

6. Todorov, 44.

7. Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (London and New York: Methuen, 1981) 48.

8. For a synopsis of different conceptions of the fantastic see, for instance, Dieter Penning, "Die Ordnung der Unordnung. Eine Bilanz zur Theorie der Fantastik," in Christian W. Thomsen und Jens Malte Fischer, Phantastik in Literatur und Kunst. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980).

9. See Gunnar Schmidt, Die Literarisierung des Unbewußten: Studien zu den phantastischen Erzählungen von Oliver Onions und Vernon Lee (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984) 22-23.

10. Jonathan Culler, "Literary Fantasy," Cambridge Review 95 (1973) 33.

11. Jackson, 72.

12. Jackson, 176.

13. Wolfgang Iser maintains that the (realistic) reader is implied as a style in the text so that we can still relate to the information, even if the narrator is unreliable. Der Akt des Lesens (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976) 28.

14. Vernon Lee, Preface to Hauntings: Fantastic Stories (London: W. Heinemann, 1890) ix. All quotations from "Amour Dure" follow the reprinted edition, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

15. Hauntings, 22.

16. Spiridion Trepka cannot identify with any society, neither past nor present. He is the alienated Pole in the German Empire. In Italy he keeps aloof of the native people--whose mundanity he disdains--for fear of having his illusion dispelled. Similarly he despises Medea's fellow countrymen who seemed to be arrogant enough to think that they could subjugate this "superior" woman.

17. Carolyn Williams, Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 122.

18. See C. Atkinson, C. Buchanan, and M. Miles, Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

19. Medea da Carpi's appearance to Spiridion Trepka in the church bears a striking resemblance to Piero della Francesca's Madonna della Misericordia (begun in 1445). Piero's frontal Madonna--a massive cylindrical form which encircles the smaller-scale human beings which invoke her. The scene when Medea "loosened her heavy black cloak, displaying a dress of deep red with gleams of silver and gold" makes us think of the Madonna's open black cloak with a red dress underneath and, most of all, towering high above the worshipping humans.

20. On this point see Genia Schulz, "Medea. Zu einem Motiv im Werk Heiner Müllers," Weiblichkeit und Tod in der Literatur (ed.) Renate Berger and Inge Stephan (Köln, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1987) 241-64.

21. Rosemary Jackson has pointed out that the fantastic often takes metaphorical constructions literally. In fantastic stories, one object does not stand for another but literally becomes that other. Fantasy resists to allegory and metaphor and it is precisely in this resistance that Jackson--like Toderov--sees its subversive power. Jackson, 41-42.

22. See "The Economic Dependence of Women" 282-83, "And here we touch the full mischief. That women are over-sexed means that, instead of depending upon their intelligence, their strength, endurance and honesty, they depend mainly upon their sex; that they appeal to men, dominate men through the fact of their sex. . . . The old, old story is repeated with slight variations from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, and from Michelet to Dumas *films*."

23. Lee uses this expression in her essay "The Economic Dependence of Woman", in which she accuses Symbolists and Decadents of mythicizing and perpetuating an image of the female that cannot be justified by her historical position.

24. For a detailed discussion of the yearning of the unrepresentable see Ellen G. Friedman, "Where Are the Missing Contents? (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon," PMLA 108. 2 (March 1993): 240-252.

25. Renaissance Fancies and Studies, 251.

26. The term "female aesthete" itself reflects her unconventional preoccupation in a male-dominated discourse. An expression which similarly reveals the biased mode of thinking of the Victorians is "woman thinker," used in an article on Vernon Lee's Vital Lies. "Are Myths Necessary? Vernon Lee's Exposure of the Syndicalist Myth," Current Opinion, 54 (April 1913) 313-314.

27. Pater, "The School of Giorgione," The Renaissance, 102-122.

28. "She shows the action of mind and soul, shows man dealing with his experience so as to control it, thus, giving him back his sense of freedom." Ian Fletcher, "Walter Pater," Modern Critical Views of Walter Pater, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985) 41-73.

29. "Dionea" has some echoes of Pater's "Denys L'Auxerrois." Like Denys, Dionea is of uncertain origin but beautiful physique. Both figures are marked as outsiders and arouse ambivalent feelings among the people. The crucial line between divine and demonic is constantly drawn and transgressed. The major difference in Lee's story is that the final catastrophe leaves Dionea obviously unharmed, whereas Pater's "pagan" God is barbarously killed by the mob.

30. Lee here echoes Heinrich Heine's "Die Götter im Exil," which she had read with great enthusiasm. The subject of the return of the pagan gods, which Heine uses to criticize the overly dogmatic and "enlightened" modes of thinking of his own time, is also a central motive in many of Lee's writings (e.g. in Euphorion). In "Dionea" she even has the narrator refer to "Heine's little book."

31. In the text, Venus and Aphrodite appear seemingly indiscriminate. The narrator seems to conflate Roman and Greek culture in the term "antique" or "ancient," as it

seems typical in common usage, even among scholars. However, in the text, there seems to be a differentiation in that Aphrodite is associated more directly with the "real" Dionea, and the body, whereas Venus is more often connected with cultural practices and symbols (for instance, in a Venus altar).--This can be seen as another example of Lee's subtle use of allusion to address an audience in a collective and differentiated way at the same time. Those who pick up the nuances would read the story in a different way from those who did not.

32. In "Studies in Literary Psychology," Vernon Lee describes such "jumps into the present at the moment of passion and action," and compares them to "stage representations." The Handling of Words 74-76.

33. For an interpretation of Freudian negation in the lesbian text see Terry Castle, The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 60

34. Marilyn R. Farwell, "Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space," Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions, ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York & London: New York University Press, 1990) 93.

35. The narrator repeatedly refers to Heine's treatise. "I am enthralled by a tragic history, the history of the fall of the Pagan Gods. . . . Have you ever read of their wanderings and disguises, in my friend Heine's little book?" (71)

36. Gunnar Schmidt, 30-75.

37. Schmidt asserts that according to statistics hysteria occurred mainly in women: "Obgleich die Hysterie ein Krankheitsschicksal ist, das von beiden Geschlechtern geteilt werden kann, so muß sie, was die statistische Verteilung zumindest für das 19. Jahrhundert betrifft, als typisch weibliche Erkrankungsform begriffen werden" (101).

38. Mary Poovey, "'Scenes of an Indelicate character': The Medical 'Treatment' of Victorian Women," Representations 14 (Spring, 1986): 146.

39. Patricia Mathews, "The Gender of Creativity in the French Symbolist Period," Women and Reason, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Kathleen Okruhlik (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 65.

40. see Mathews, 165, who quotes from one of the most extreme and influential theories of genius in fin-de-siècle France, Cesare Lombroso, L'Homme de Génie (Paris: F. Alcan, 1889).

41. The narrator's language in "Amour Dure" bears a certain resemblance to Leo's narrative in She, such as the archaic "thou" and, in particular, the epithet "She-who-must-be-obeyed." On Haggard's phrases see The Annotated "She": A Critical Edition of H. Rider Haggard's Victorian Romance, ed. Norman Etherington (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991).--Although it is most unlikely that Lee knew of H. Rider Haggard's She which appeared in the same year as "Amour Dure," Lee's story could almost be read as a persiflage of Haggard's idea of a powerful woman endowed with immortal beauty and penetrating intellect. The theme of the fierce single-sex attachment and jealousy of rivals of the opposite sex appears in many of Haggard's and other contemporary romance writers' works so that Lee may well have aimed at the rage of the "femme fatale" type narrative at large.

42. Jackson, 179.

43. All quotations from "Prince Albric and the Snake Lady" from Vernon Lee, The Snake Lady and Other Stories, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: Grove Press, 1954).

44. Marilyn R. Farwell "Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space." Jay and Glasgow, Lesbian Texts and Intertexts, 91-103.

45. As Martha Vicinus has pointed out, it is important that the oedipal story has no relevance in this context. "The oedipal implications of a boy fixated on an erotic mother are irrelevant, for Lee is constructing the ideal lesbian romance. The godmother has created Alberic without reproduction; rather, their relationship is one of reciprocal need." Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?" 90-114.

46. Kurt Ruh, Die 'Melusine' des Thüring von Ringoltingen (München: Verlag der Bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985) 20.

47. Castle quotes this phrase from Edward Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," Raritan 11 (Summer 1991): 17-31.

48. Terry Castle, The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 64-65.

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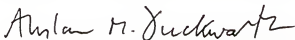
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christa Zorn-Belde grew up and was educated in Germany. She graduated from Hamburg University in 1978 with master's degrees in English, history, and educational science. From 1979 to 1990 she taught classes in English and history in Hamburg at the Gymnasium level (grades 5-13). From 1986 to 1988 she taught German language and literature as a Fulbright exchange teacher at the University of Central Florida. Inspired by the academic atmosphere of an American university, she decided to pursue studies in literature leading to a Ph.D. In 1990 she enrolled in the doctoral program of the English Department at the University of Florida, where she specialized in Victorian literature, aesthetic theory, and feminist criticism. Christa Zorn-Belde is also a painter trained by several studio artists in Germany and the United States. In 1993 an exhibition of her works appeared at the Women's Studies Art Gallery at the University of Florida. Trained in art as well as in literature, she has considered aesthetic questions in the broadest sense. Her dissertation investigates late-

nineteenth-century aestheticism, particularly the connection between gender and aesthetics in the texts of the British aesthete Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) and Walter Pater. She received her doctoral degree from the University of Florida in August 1994.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Alistair M. Duckworth, chairman
Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Elizabeth Langland
Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



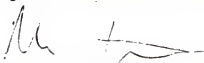
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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



August 1994

Dean, Graduate School